

FINDING BLACK MOUNTAIN
THE SPIRIT OF PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

A Dissertation
by
JOHN HENSON

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APPROVED BY:

Dr. Chris Patti, Ph.D
Chairperson, Dissertation Committee

Dr. Vachel Miller, Ed.D
Member, Dissertation Committee

Dr. Kim Becnel, Ph.D
Member, Dissertation Committee

Dr. Vachel Miller, Ed.D
Director, Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Dr. Michael McKenzie, Ph.D
Dean, Cratis D. Williams School of Graduate Studies

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Abstract

FINDING BLACK MOUNTAIN THE SPIRIT OF PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

John Henson
B.S., Appalachian State University
M.Ed., Boston University
Ed.D., Appalachian State University

Dissertation Committee Chairperson: Dr. Chris Patti

This study explores the phenomena of the Black Mountain College Semester (BMCS) as a means to locate the spirit of progressive education in the 21st Century. Through interviews with contemporary faculty who organized and participated in the BMCS, along with document analysis of texts related to the history and legacy of the BMC, this research seeks to identify effective strategies for cultivating innovation, creativity, and community in the classrooms of today and tomorrow. Using a thematic analysis of interviews and historical texts, this study illuminates the values that past and present educators hold as sacred, and the ways in which they put those values into practice in their classrooms. Findings illuminate persistent tensions between descriptions of optimal learning conditions, and the realities of the highly-structured nature of higher education. Specifically, a tension between academic structure and freedom was prominent along with an acknowledgement of the significant impact Information and Communication Technologies are having on our on all aspects of contemporary lived experiences. This study carries implications for the ways in which

institutions of higher education, and the educators working within, go about establishing innovation, creativity, and community as values.

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Lastly, I wish to acknowledge all teachers who each day aspire to honor the interests, experiences, and skillsets of their students. Within your classrooms, the great ideas of tomorrow are incubated and nourished.

Dedication

I dedicate this research to the power and promise of the imagination—yours and mine. For through our dreams, we can transform the world’s greatest challenges into opportunities.

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Chapter 1

Introduction and Statement of the Problem

“You’re encouraging me,” [Martin Duberman] replied, “to write a book about the impact of Black Mountain on *me*—which is exactly the kind of book I want to write.”

“Then I say, ‘Good luck!’” [Josef] Albers answered.

(Martin Duberman, *Black Mountain College: An Exploration in Community*, p. xxiii)

My dissertation research explores the history and legacy of Black Mountain College (1933-1957) through the phenomena of the Black Mountain College Semester at Appalachian State University (2018) as a means of locating the spirit of progressive education in the 21st Century. Although creativity, innovation, and community are hailed as indispensable elements of education (de Alencar & Oiveira, 2016; Choudhury & Share, 2012; Lille & Romero, 2017; Marqui, Radan, & Liu, 2017; Sotiropoulou-Zormpala, 2012), standardization and rigid assessment measures have displaced and diminished their presence and value (Mossman, 2018; Robinson, 2008). While narrow reforms are typically considered a plight of K-12 educational contexts (Tierney, 2013), increasing standardization is also a looming threat to higher education and the goals of the liberal arts (Giroux, 2016; 2019). Yet, perhaps now more than ever, creativity, innovation, and community—key tenants of progressive and critical pedagogies (Dewey, 1938/1997; Freire, 1970/2003; hooks, 1994/2014; Leogrande, 2014)—are essential capacities for confronting the challenges facing our world. By exploring the spirit of the Black Mountain College Semester (BMCS) through in-depth conversations with the BMCS Faculty Fellows and coordinators, and investigating

the educational philosophy of Black Mountain College (BMC) through document analysis, my research accomplishes the complex task of illuminating the persistence and embodiment of creativity, innovation, and community in both past and present eras of higher education.

In this chapter, I trace the problematic history of standardization in education, describe the promise of creativity, and preview what we have to learn from BMC and the contemporary practitioners of the BMCS.

Rationale and Context of the Issues Facing Higher Education

As the new millennium turns twenty, we face a range of significant challenges that threaten to undermine the wellbeing and stability of communities throughout the world. Among these threats are: the climate crisis, domestic and international terrorism, police violence, racism, gender discrimination and harassment, political polarization, economic disparity and displacement, and a growing refugee crisis. In their report *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, the United Nations (2015) outlined these and other significant challenges, along with necessary steps that must be taken in order to address them. Among their recommendations was a call for substantial investments in education to promote equity and innovation. Yet, scholars have argued that tackling these significant challenges requires particular educational approaches—specifically ones which foreground creativity, problem solving skills, and a focus on both local and global communities (Garte, 2017; Gibson, 2010; Miller, 2017).

Positioning education as a panacea in solving the problems facing our world is not a new concept. Education is often hailed as a silver bullet to combat social, economic, political,

and environmental problems (Ravitch, 2016). Through education, individuals may be provided an opportunity to acquire and apply knowledge to come up with solutions to the world's most challenging issues. However, as efforts aimed at improvement or reform typically call for increased standardization and accountability (Garte, 2017; Ravitch, 2016), some scholars argue that education is moving *away* from being an environment that nurtures creativity and problem solving and *towards* one guided by structure and conformity (Giroux, 2016; Waks, 2013).

By the early 1980s, reports clearly show that education in the United States was falling behind other developed nations, particularly in math and science (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). During this time, national educational reforms mandated curricula that would promote knowledge acquisition over application (Garte, 2017). Particularly in K-12 educational settings, reform efforts were enacted that aimed to endorse a more unified definition of what and how students ought to be learning and to provide accountability to ensure schools and teachers successfully met objectives. Measures designed to pressure schools and teachers with increased accountability also had the effect of diminishing the role of creativity, innovation, and community in the classroom (Longo, 2010). Eighteen years later, a new round of national education reform efforts, known as "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB), continued to diminish the value of creativity in learning (Cawelti, 2006; Gay, 2007), as well the autonomy of teachers to make decisions about their students' learning (Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008). According to Jorgensen and Hoffmann (2003), the framers of NCLB argued that, "children who are being left behind must be identified and

states will have the responsibility to provide the resources to teach every child how to read, to apply mathematics, to study, to learn—to succeed” (p. 5). Yet, the shortcomings of NCLB are well documented, including its assault on the professional authority of teachers and schools (Heilig, Cole, & Aguilar, 2010; Corput, 2012) and its inability to improve graduation rates or prepare students to meet the challenges of the 21st Century (Hirsh, 2007; Little, 2013).

Similarly, higher education also operates within a climate of increased structure and accountability (Giroux, 2016; Mossman, 2018). Mossman (2018) cites Faust (2009) who argued:

Universities are nevertheless caving to pressure from taxpayers, government, and their corporate and other financial supporters to align their missions, strategic plans, and assessment with a market model. As well, most institutional and state boards overseeing educational reform are dominated by business professionals, not educators or academic experts. (p.40)

Like many before me—including the founders of Black Mountain College (n.d.)—I contend that a business model is not the best structure for cultivating creativity in education. Rather, education is better served through emphasizing real-world contexts and opportunities for problem solving.

Further, in a study by Ehtiyar and Baser (2019), students reported that their learning experiences in higher education were largely uncreative. Nearly half of the students they surveyed said, “that there were no changes in their creative potential, and more than half of [those reported] that university education even decreased their creative potential” (p. 124). This report serves as a reminder that creativity is not automatically present in education and

that faculty may need assistance in cultivating teaching practices where creativity is promoted. Creativity in education involves active learning and promotes critical thinking and problem solving skills (Heilig, Cole, & Aguilar, 2010). As higher-educators, many of us know from experience that creativity is “a survival skill” (de Alencar & de Oliveira, 2016, p. 555) and is a necessary ingredient for preparing students to meet the challenges of an ever-more-rapidly changing world (Gibson, 2010).

Although scholars have argued that standardization threatens to preclude creativity and problem solving from teaching and learning today (Gaspar, & Mabic, 2015; Giroux, 2016), they are not new concepts. For over a century, educators and educational theorists have explored ways to position students as active participants and negotiators of meaning during processes of learning (Dewey, 1938/1997; Montessori, 1959; Rousseau, 1896/2003). Progressive pedagogies centralize the role of students/participants/actors in generating creative learning and solving problems. Progressive education also recognize the importance of contexts such as race, class, gender, identity, culture, and place in education.

Innovation, creativity, and community may be under attack in contemporary educational settings (Heilig, Cole, & Aguilar, 2010; Giroux, 2013), but the world continues to demand these talents of society, and many educators are finding ways to foster these skillsets in the learners with whom they work. Through my dissertation research, I endeavor to explore the ways in which these qualities are embodied in higher education settings. I seek to better understand the spirit of progressive teaching and learning practices in higher education today: What are the best educational models to help guide our efforts to cultivate

innovators and problem solvers capable of meeting current and future challenges? We need not re-invent the wheel when Black Mountain College (BMC) offered an unprecedented example of progressive and democratic education less than one hundred years ago and one hundred miles from the campus of Appalachian State University.

For twenty four years, the BMC stood as a bastion for progressive educational practices (Duberman, 1972/2009; Harris, 2018; Reynolds, 1998; Williams & Bathanti, 2017). While it was not an arts school in the traditional sense—preparing students for careers as painters, sculptors, or musicians—it did place creativity and the arts at the center of the curriculum for all learners and all subjects as a means of cultivating innovative thinking and problem solving. Upon its opening in 1933, BMC quickly garnered a reputation as a sanctuary for creative practice, critical thinking, and democracy in education: a reputation which attracted the attention and admiration of some of the most iconic minds of the 20th Century, including John Dewey, Albert Einstein, and Aldus Huxley (Duberman, 1972/2009; Reynolds, 1998). There were no grades, no required courses, and the school was not accredited. Although a handful of students graduated during the College’s short twenty four years of existence, student accounts indicate a desire for an experience more than a degree (Dawson, 1991; Duberman, 1972/2009; Reynolds, 1998). During its time of operation, BMC inspired all students faculty and staff who graced the campus with new perspectives on creativity, compassion, and expression.

Fast forward to 2018, when educators at Appalachian State University created an event that connected with patrons across Western North Carolina and beyond to host the

Black Mountain College Semester (BMCS). The semester offered a scholarly occasion to remember, celebrate, modernize, and even critique the legacy and spirit of Black Mountain College. A grant funded initiative sponsored by the North Carolina Humanities Council, Appalachian State University's Chancellor's Office, the Turchin Center, and countless volunteers, the BMCS hosted guest lectures, dances, *happenings*, geodesic dome building parties, and enabled the publication of the 2018 quadruple special edition of the Appalachian Journal (Ballard & Bathanti, 2017), the largest ever published in the Journal's history (Bathanti, personal communication; 2018). Each of the above elements of the BMCS served to commemorate the legacy of this remarkable institution and local treasure. In addition to these celebratory events, eight professors at Appalachian State University were selected to become BMCS Faculty Fellows tasked with integrating BMC into their contemporary coursework during the spring semester of 2018. My research explores the stories and experiences of these educators who took part in either organizing or facilitating the BMCS in order to locate the spirit of progressive education in the 21st Century.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of my study is to understand the complexities of teaching and learning in higher education in the 21st Century through the contexts of the BMCS and BMC. Informed by conversations with BMCS Faculty Fellows and coordinators, and a review of documents related to the history and legacy of BMC, my research distills wisdom related to the theory and practice of cultivating creativity, innovation, and community in education: skillsets which are essential to the tenants of progressive and critical pedagogies. Although the values

of, and strategies for, cultivating progressive teaching and learning practices have been explored previously (Emanuel, & Challons-Lipton, 2013; Gambone, 2017; Gibson, 2010; Hayes, 2006; Lille & Romero, 2017), few studies have conducted slow and in-depth qualitative interviews with accomplished faculty in higher education as a means of best representing their nuanced perspectives and practices. Yet, reflection on teaching practice and listening to the voices and perspectives of past and present educators may be a great way to assess whether or not our practices lead towards our goals.

Research Questions

Informed by the “hyper-qualitative” (Patti, 2013) questions asked in the doctoral dissertation of my advisor (an ethnographic and oral history study with Holocaust survivors), the primary question that frames my dissertation research is: What can I learn about the spirit of progressive education in the 21st century from the phenomena of the Black Mountain College Semester? To explore this question, I have focused my analysis through the following sub-questions:

1. How does the history and spirit of Black Mountain College inform the work of the Faculty Fellows?
2. How do the Faculty Fellows describe teaching and learning, and what can I learn and share through interactive interviews with them?
3. How can we creatively prepare students to face the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century, and what does this have to do with the lessons of Black Mountain?

4. How can I richly represent and share these conversations within the confines of a dissertation?

Constructing my inquiry in this way enabled me to situate my conversations with Faculty Fellows within the historical context of Black Mountain College, while also attending to the nature of progressive education, then and now. Further, this inquiry allowed me to address the relationships between pedagogies and the classroom as informed by past and present contexts. While anchored in the discipline of education, such an inquiry is inherently interdisciplinary and brings together a wide-range of conversations in the disciplines of history, oral history, interpersonal communication, aesthetics, philosophy, and (“post”)qualitative methods.

Overview of Methodology

As the contexts and participants of the study were situated in both contemporary and historical settings, my study employed a unique and emergent qualitative process to explore the spirit of progressive education in these past and present contexts. My contemporary participants comprised seven of the Faculty Fellows who integrated BMC into their coursework and three of the coordinators of the BMCS who facilitated varying components leading up to, and during the spring semester of 2018 (Listed in Table 1). Using informal and conversational interviews (Ellis & Patti, 2014) I spoke with participants about teaching and learning broadly, their educational philosophy, and the pedagogical strategies they employ to meet the goals they set in the classroom.

My historical data included texts by and about the historic leaders, teachers, students, and scholars of BMC. The data I collected related to the history of BMC included documents related to the founding mission of the college, transcripts from board meetings, letters, videos, photographs, and interviews that were conducted previously with people who attended and taught there, or who had family members that did. These historical data points were obtained through a range of print and digital sources, including Appalachian State University's digital archive of historical documents (Black Mountain College: Innovation in Art, Education, and Lifestyle, n.d.).

After transcribing fourteen hours of recorded audio from interviews—totaling one hundred and eighty six pages of transcriptions—and reviewing documents related to the history and legacy of BMC, I employed thematic analysis (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012) to identify and refine broad patterns and salient concepts. The process of reviewing historical documents in conjunction with analyzing the interviews with contemporary participants proved beneficial to developing my understanding of how the BMCS was oriented by the values, intentions, and actions of the BMC. After identifying forty-one original codes within my data, I refined these categories to illuminate four interconnected themes that bear on the larger research inquiry.

Role and Assumptions of the Researcher

In conducting this study, my role and assumptions as a researcher were informed by my background and collective experiences as a media maker and storyteller, an educator and practicing teacher, and an aspiring scholar in the field of educational leadership.

Having studied the art and craft of media making for the better part of two decades, my approach to this research project was informed by my desire to employ these skillsets to aesthetically represent my research process. In this way, I viewed my research—and my role as a researcher—from the perspective of a documentary filmmaker whose job was to weave a narrative across the stories that emerged from my data.

As an educator and practicing teacher, I have observed firsthand the positive impact of cultivating student-centered, experiential, and social learning in my courses. Perhaps these progressive educational practices have always been the most effective educational method, or perhaps our present day and age necessitates this kind of approach more than previous eras of education. Regardless, I hold a belief that progressive educational tactics are essential for not only tailoring learning experiences to meet the needs and interests of today's learners, but also for addressing issues of social justice within educational experiences. As a result, I acknowledge and appreciate the ways in which my biases and assumptions presuppose the value of progressive educational approaches in higher education today. I am an open advocate for student-centered and democratic learning, and this study offers me an opportunity to explore nuances and stories of educators who also value this approach.

As a student studying educational leadership, I acknowledge the ways in which the courses I have taken and the subsequent research and literature I have reviewed contribute to my perspective. Not only do I subscribe to the value of progressive education and experiential learning, but I have also gained an awareness of the ways that structures of oppression have created wealth, power, and prosperity for some populations and cultural

groups, at the expense and marginalization of others. Further, I feel these systems oppress racially and economically disadvantaged populations, causing them to become even further marginalized and exploited. Given these realities, I believe that, as educators, we have an obligation to hold spaces for conversations about oppression and design curriculum that positions students to work towards justice and democracy.

Finally, as a scholar who has studied the impact of media on education, society, and culture, I understand that our relationship with ICTs presents both opportunities and challenges for individuals and social groups today. On the one hand, never before in the history of human civilization has the power to access and publish information been more readily available. On the other hand, as James Toub stated during our interview together, the “locus” (Toub, personal communication, 2018) of human perception seems to no longer reside entirely within our five senses. As such, I acknowledge the inevitable impact that the changing nature of discourse is having on teaching, learning, and living in the 21st Century.

Significance

This research is significant on at least two interrelated levels: 1) On a macro level, my research points to ways we, as a society, might leverage innovation, creativity, and community for solving the challenges facing our world today and tomorrow; and 2) on a more nuanced level, my study illuminates the practices and perceptions of ten educators teaching in higher education today: their wisdom, experience, and the practices they enact to help students become creative problem solvers. Further, by employing an interpersonal and conversational interviewing approach (Patti, 2015) with Faculty Fellows and coordinators of

the BMCS, my research seeks to open new ways of approaching the topic of higher education in the 21st Century.

Finally, by triangulating the comments of Faculty Fellows and coordinators of the BMCS with historical documents related to the history and legacy of the BMC, my research points to the ways that effective educational models of the past can be used to build powerful educational experiences in the present, while striving to build a better future.

Organization of the Dissertation

In Chapter 2, I review literature across multiple interrelated topics, specifically: the history of the Black Mountain College (BMC), progressive education, critical pedagogy, challenges in education, creativity in education, and finally the phenomenon of the Black Mountain College Semester. I synthesize and critique literature across these areas of inquiry to illuminate the many factors influencing education today and to situate my conversations with the Faculty Fellows of the BMCS. I conclude this chapter with a discussion my own subjectivity as a researcher and the ways in which my background as a scholar impacts my research process.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the research methods employed in this study and describe the ways in which I utilized high quality media production equipment in an effort to capture my interactions and conversations with participants in the richest quality possible. I describe my specific approach to thematic analysis and the ways I incorporated media editing software to archive, organize, and document the themes that emerged from each conversation.

Chapters 4 through 7 comprise the findings of my dissertation research. These chapters are presented as vignettes that detail the four broad themes of my findings: Student Centered, Community-Minded, Experiential Learning, and Context. In each vignette, I weave together the most salient comments and stories from participants, along with a discussion of the significance of each passage and connections to the broader themes of my research.

In Chapter 8, I provide a discussion of the key findings from my research. Specifically, I describe the prominence of the tension between academic structure and freedom across the first three vignettes of my findings and discuss the ways our shifting relationship with information and knowledge is perhaps *the* defining characteristic of the context of teaching, learning, and living in the 21st Century. I conclude by acknowledging the limitations of my study and making recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

In this review of literature, I use a reflexive approach to contextualize the purpose and histories of Black Mountain College (BMC) within the broader philosophy of progressive education in the United States. Specifically, I describe how progressive education was unique from other educational practices of the time, as it prioritized the interests, experiences, and skillsets of the learner as a primary concern and point of origin for the curriculum (Dewey, 1938/1997; Garte, 2017; Hayey, 2006). During hands on and experiential processes, learners act as problem solvers who are given opportunities to apply knowledge and skillsets across a range of contexts. Growing out of the movement of progressive education, I next discuss critical pedagogy as an educational practice that uses problem-posing strategies to empower learners to become aware of, and ultimately subvert, structures of oppression (Freire, 1970/2003; hooks, 1994/2014). I present research and scholarship related to the contemporary challenges facing education—and educators—in the 21st Century and describe how increasing structure and bureaucratization threaten to diminish the roles creativity and problem solving in education. I discuss how, despite such structural barriers, educators continue to find ways to cultivate creativity in the classroom and share research related to the perceived value and impact of creativity in education, and make the case that creativity is essential to fostering critical practices in today's classrooms.

Moving to the specifics of my research contexts, I next describe the spirit of education that was cultivated and refined at BMC during its years of operation (1933-1957) and discuss the ways in which the College's philosophy placed the arts at the center of the curriculum and how its educational philosophy was largely informed by the movement of progressive education that took place during the early part of the 20th Century (Zilversmit, 1993). Serving as a demonstration of creative teaching and learning in practice, I conclude this chapter by discussing the mission, purpose, and value of the Black Mountain College Semester (BMCS), which occurred at Appalachian State University primarily during the spring semester of 2018. The BMCS served as the primary context for my dissertation research, therefore this final section as a transition into chapter 3, where I establish my research methodology.

My strategy for compiling this review of literature involved engaging in what Certeau (1984) described as an act of intellectual/academic nomadism and poaching. Building upon the post-structural literary critiques of Roland Barthes (1977), Certeau (1984) argued that, "the reader takes neither the position of the author nor an author's position. He invents in texts something different from what they 'intended'" (p. 169). Such a position acknowledges that a review of literature is rarely exhaustive, but rather an adventure in interpretation and a *traverse* across a range of scholarly topics, toward the goal of setting out a clear context for the methods and interviews that follow. As I wander nomadically, I gather concepts across a range of fields for the purposes of mapping the spirit of progressive education in the 21st Century.

Building upon Certeau's reading as poaching, Martin Duberman (1972/2009) described his tenuous position as a historian of BMC and the trepidation he felt regarding his role in telling the stories of others. He argued that the important consideration was not "*whether* the individual historian should appear in his books, but *how* [they] should appear—overtly or covertly" (p. xvii). Duberman's identity as a historian and his relationship with the history of the BMC resonated deeply with me, and while I am certainly not a historian, nor an expert on BMC literature, my process did involve mining the literature on BMC to better trace and understand the spirit of progressive education.

The scholarship related to BMC is vast and growing. The nuanced topics scholars have explored range from interviews with Alma Stone Williams, who in 1944 became the first African American Student to integrate into an institution of higher education anywhere in the "Bible Belt" (Williams, 2017; Williams & Bathanti, 2017), to the history and building of the campus barn (Silver, 2017). Scholars have investigated the photographers who captured the building of Geodesic Domes by Buckminster Fuller and his students (Thomson, 2017), as well as the impact of European refugees—fleeing fascism in the 1930's—on American institutions of higher education (Füssli, 2006). Importantly, many of the abovementioned works were curated and published at Appalachian State University in a special edition of the *Appalachian Journal* dedicated to past and present stories related to BMC (Ballard & Bathanti, 2017).

My research and this review of literature grow out of a desire to explore past and present examples of the spirit of progressive education as it was cultivated at BMC. My

intention is to demonstrate the thread that connects the historical philosophies of progressive education with the contemporary, critical, and creative practices occurring in teaching and learning in higher education today.

Progressive Education: Origins and Theory

At the turn of the 20th Century progressive education began to emerge as a holistic, active, and learner-centric approach to teaching and learning. With an emphasis on democratic processes and citizenship, founders of progressive education sought to empower students to apply their knowledge in personally meaningful ways to solve problems that were authentic to real world contexts.

Garte (2017) noted that earliest scholars to prioritize student interests and experiences in education were Jean Jacques Rousseau (1896/2003) and Maria Montessori (1959). Although these scholars approached education by different means—and from opposite ends of the socio-economic spectrum—both viewed experiential learning as a means by which to cultivate independence, autonomy, and critical thought: Rousseau in helping upper class children escape the materialism of wealth; Montessori in helping impoverished and orphaned children escape oppression (Garte, 2017, p. 9).

Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, and John Dewey are considered to be the founders of progressive education, with Dewey being perhaps the most renowned scholar in this field due to his extensive and prolific publishing on the topic (Hayes, 2006). These scholars viewed progressive education as a blended process, focusing simultaneously on cultivating the needs of the individual learner while also developing their appreciation and

awareness of the needs of society. Progressive educators argued that the school must prioritize student' interest as a means by which to nurture curiosity, while also building awareness of local and global issues.

Dewey wrote extensively about education (1918; 1938/1997; 1983; 1988; 2007) and is still at the forefront of contemporary conversations around of education and democracy (2007). Among his vast and complex writing, one particular idea came to mind for my dissertation advisor, which bares upon the art-as-education center of this study (Dewey, 1988). In his chapter "Custom and Habit," Dewey (1988) identified and classified "good" and "bad" habits and the role institutions—centrally *education*—play and ought to play in how individuals form habits in society. As with progressive education itself, Dewey defined good habits as those which are *creative and generative*, rather than those which are merely the technical and thoughtless repetition of past actions. "What makes a habit bad," writes Dewey, "is enslavement to old ruts" (1988, p. 48). However, what makes a habit *good* is that it gets one in touch with one's senses in the present moment. Dewey advocates for mindful habits which bring together theory and practice, art(freedom/creativity) and mechanization(structure/routine), spirit and action, mind and body. In Dewey's words: "Habit is an ability, an art, formed through past experience. But whether an ability is limited to repetition of past acts adapted to past conditions or is available for new emergencies depends wholly upon what kind of habit exists" (p. 48). He continued, "the genuine heart of reasonableness (and of goodness in conduct) lies in effective mastery of the conditions which now enter into action" (p. 48). And he concludes, "The intelligent or artistic habit is the

desirable thing, and the routine the undesirable” (p. 52). Dewey showed that the spirit of progressive education is in the cultivation of intelligent and artistic habits—*good* and *mindful* habits which are readily available and adaptable to present circumstances. This is the past and present hope of creative, progressive education which helps to cultivate more engaged and actualized students and citizens.

Dewey’s emphasis on cultivating a harmony between the interests, habits, and talents of the individual, and the needs of society. Progressive education seeks out this harmony, and positions learners to make their own decisions and apply knowledge in ways that are at once personal and meaningful to the broader community. Further, Dewey’s vision of a progressive education also prioritizes the learner’s cultivation of artistic appreciation and ability as a means by which learners can express and develop their thinking.

As Garte (2017) articulated, Dewey believed that “only an inspired, personally engaged citizenry would allow for a true democracy” (p. 9). In this way, Dewey viewed experiential education as the most ideal path—perhaps the only path—towards democratic citizenship. By emphasizing the importance of inspiration and personal engagement with the curriculum, Dewey advocated for learner autonomy to be driving forces within a vibrant educational experience. In such a learning environment, the role of the teacher becomes that of a guide: someone that might direct a student’s attention towards worthwhile projects, but otherwise exists to support, encourage, and challenge a student while they navigate the learning process.

To put his educational philosophy into practice, Dewey opened a lab school at the University of Chicago—founded in 1894 and opened in 1896—where learning was hands-on and students were the drivers of their education experiences, and teachers assisted students in reaching the goals they set for themselves.

In 1919—around the same time as the publication of Dewey’s (1938/1997) landmark text *Experience and Education*—the newly formed Progressive Education Association publicized a set of “Founding Principles” (Little, 2013) to guide educational practices:

Freedom to develop naturally, Interest the motive of all work, The teacher as a guide, not a task-master, Scientific study of pupil development, Greater attention to all that effects the child’s physical development, Cooperation between school and home to meet the needs of child-life, The progressive school as a leader in educational movements. (p. 85)

These principles clearly foreground a commitment to student centered and holistic learning. Importantly, the language used in crafting the principles is clearly written for population of younger learners, rather than students in higher education. Although originally designed with children in mind, during the progressive education movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, educational institutions adopted these principles across a range of learning populations—including in higher education like BMC. As discussed later in this chapter, these principles remain important and valued in education today, with research being conducted to explore the role of creativity (de Alencar, & de Oliveira, 2016; Ehtiyar & Baser, 2019; Sotiropoulou-Zormpala, 2012) and problem solving in education (Choudhury & Share, 2012; Portelli & Eizadirad, 2018).

Following Dewey's model, by the middle of the 20th century, many child-study schools had opened across the United States. Although these schools strived to cultivate practices consistent with the philosophy of progressive education, critics argued that many of these schools were "primarily focused on the individual child and were less concerned with social issues" (Garte, 2017, p. 9). Interestingly, some contemporary scholars exploring progressive education make a point to distinguish between a "child-centered progressive philosophy and a justice-oriented progressive philosophy" (Gambone, 2017, p. 64). Without also considering the needs of society, opponents—Dewey included—argued that these child-study schools did not prepare students to empathize with individuals, communities, and social groups that are different from their own and therefore did not serve to foster a democratic society. They worried that, without equal emphasis on democratic citizenship, students would not be prepared to innovatively, morally, and equitably solve real-world problems and the challenges of tomorrow.

In light of his emphasis on democratic learning, Dewey identified the following two questions for educators to think with when orienting their practice towards an ever-changing and uncertain future:

- 1) How are we to *understand* the new educational trends as reflections of the *social context*—as an *inevitable* effort to bring education into line with the broader pattern of change in industrial society?
- 2) How are we to *build upon and direct* them and align them with *democratic social ideals*?

These questions reinforced the role of analysis and critique in the philosophy of progressive education and also foregrounded future educational movements whose purpose would solely pertain to identifying and subverting structures of oppression.

Some advocates of progressive education criticized the ways in which mostly middle and upper-class white children have benefitted from these educational experiences (Gambone, 2017; Garte, 2017; hooks, 1994/2014). As progressive education became an increasingly acclaimed strategy for teaching and learning by the middle of the 20th Century, many scholars began exploring ways to leverage this active and hands on educational philosophy to emancipate marginalized populations. In the following section, I describe the ways that critical pedagogy was inspired by—and emerged out of—progressive education, but focuses exclusively on advocating for the needs of marginalized populations.

Critical Pedagogy: Origins & Theory

Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women [sic] deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.

- Richard Shaull, preface to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 34

Aligned with John Dewey's (1938/1997; 1983) philosophy of progressive education, critical pedagogy represents the examination, critique, and action against structures and groups that enable and ultimately perpetuate oppression (Boyd, 2016; Freire, 1970/2003; Giroux, 2006; 2011; 2016; hooks, 1994/2014; Leogrande, 2014; Portelli & Eizadirad, 2018). Critical pedagogy is a broad umbrella term and coalition of approaches to conscious

education and is therefore elastic and intended to evolve to confront new issues in social justice as they manifest. Through the development of literacy skillsets (Freire, 1970/2003; Leogrande, 2014) for the purposes of examining and critiquing social, political, and economic structures (Freire, 1970/2003; hooks, 1994/2014; Giroux, 2006; 2007), critical pedagogy positions individuals to understand the constructed nature of their current reality and subsequently subvert or escape oppressive situations.

Subverting oppression through praxis. Paulo Freire, luminary scholar and author of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970/2003), described oppression as a persisting condition across the cultural groups he observed in South America. He perceived oppression as a central circumstance of reality for peasants in South America, and argued that oppressive relationships were inevitable within any system where workers produce goods and services within a business that they do not own. Such domination results in the dehumanization of entire groups of people, races, and classes. Freire refers to these oppressive arrangements as a “*prescription*” (p.47) where the oppressor’s will and well-being dictate the behavior and consciousness of the oppressed.

Freire (1970/2003) noted that the schools he observed in South America enabled and perpetuated cycles of oppression, coining the term “banking model” to describe educational practices where the knowledge, points-of-view, and values shared were solely the possession of the school and its teachers, and that a student’s job was to consume and regurgitate this predetermined information (p. 72). In Freire’s critique of the banking model of education, he argued that students come to school each day to make a withdrawal in the form of their

teacher's knowledge. Freire took issue with this process on a number of levels: First, what—and whose—knowledge is being discussed is solely left to the discretion of the teacher and institution. Therefore, the beliefs and experiences of the learner are rendered irrelevant. Second, the educational process is biased towards the established dominant power and existing economic structures—thereby serving the existing oppressors. Such an educational system is designed to not only perpetuate existing systems of power, but to also to produce citizens who comply with, and are fearful of, the law. A third issue Freire took with a banking model of education was that it did not place any value on the needs, experiences, or strengths of a given student. Freire contended that a banking model of education perpetuated cycles of oppression, but believed that critical pedagogy could be used to engage learners in the critique and subversion of established unjust structures of power and oppression.

Freire adopted the term *Praxis* as a way of describing his philosophy for enacting critical pedagogy. Praxis is an educational process whereby the learner engages in a recursive cycle of theory, action, and reflection. *Praxis* brings theory and action together, as Dewey (1988) found essential for all conscious and artistic habits. As advocacy often manifests in the form of protest, Freire's work became synonymous with radicalism and aggressive practices of dissent (Dardar, Baltodano, & Torres, 2009; Ellsworth, 1989; Giroux, 2006; 2007; Palos & McGinnis, 2011), however contemporary scholars have articulated the various ways in which subversion can be enacted civically in both community and educational settings (Choudhury & Share, 2012; Kellner & Share, 2007b; 2007c; Portelli & Eizadirad, 2018; Kress & Degennaro, 2013).

After advocacy and activism, students are invited to reflect on their experience, considering the structure of oppression they observed, the nature of their critique, and the nature of their action. In this cycle of praxis, the end goal is for students to not only work towards changing the very systems of oppression to which they are bound, but to also become more reflective and metacognitive about the constructed nature of cultural oppression (Foucault, 1975/1995).

Adding performativity and playfulness to critical educational experiences and expressions, Augusto Boal (1974/1979) opened a new dimension to critical pedagogy in writing his book *Theatre of the Oppressed*. Inspired by the writings of Freire (1970/2003), Boal approached the classroom as a stage and the curriculum as “rehearsal for real life situations” (Rodriguez, et al., 2006, p. 237), where problem solving converges with performance.

Bringing critical pedagogy to the United States. Ira Shor (2012)—credited as the educator who validated critical pedagogy as an essential practice in developed countries like the United States—characterizes the field as:

Habits of thought, reading, writing, and speaking which go beneath surface meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional clichés, received wisdom, and mere opinions, to understand the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action, event, object, process, organization, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media, or discourse. (p. 129)

In Shor’s definition, critical pedagogy serves as an invitation—to students and teachers alike—to analyze the power-knowledge relationships found throughout local and global

aspects of society. Shor believed that education can either democratize (liberate) or colonize (indoctrinate) learners. Although he was initially unsure of whether or not critical pedagogy was an appropriate educational strategy for people and groups who are not peasants, he soon discovered the ways in which it could serve as a means by which to counter the oppressive structures found in the developed world.

In her writing on the life and teaching practices of Ira Shor, Cathy Leogrande (2014) describes the ways that Shor's scholarship "traces connections from Dewey to Vygotsky to Freire, showing how critical pedagogy has its roots in a problem-based constructionist approach to education" (p. 114). Leogrande's ability to frame the connections between these educational philosophies not only assists educators today in understanding their continued relevance, but also serves as an invitation to scholars, like myself, who seek to explore how past educational initiatives can inspire and orient educators today and in the future.

The persistence of the banking model. Many faculty in higher education today incorporate critical pedagogy into their teaching practice, seeking to enact humanizing educational experiences through active, critical, culturally relevant, and learner-centered experiences. Yet, while critical and progressive pedagogies may be rooted in dialogue, critique, and advocacy (Dewey, 1938/1997; Freire, 1970/2003; Giroux, 2011; 2016; Shor, 2012) not all educators place these responsibilities in the hands of students. hooks (1994/2014) cautioned that some faculty espouse critical pedagogy from the metaphorical pulpit at the front of the classroom, which runs counterintuitive to the central values of this educational philosophy. She describes being dismayed when, “encounter[ing] white male professors who claimed to follow Freire’s model even as their pedagogical practices were mired in structures of domination, mirroring the styles of conservative professors even as they approached subjects from a more progressive standpoint” (p. 17-18). hooks argues that such one-sided teaching practices devolve education into an act of coercion, and falls prey to the very banking model of education Freire found inescapably problematic.

Higher Education in the 21st Century

The classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy. For years it has been a place where education has been undermined by teachers and students alike who seek to use it as a platform for opportunistic concerns rather than as a place to learn.

(bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 1994/2014, p. 12)

Within a climate of unprecedented social, political, economic, and environmental volatility, scholars argue that institutions of higher education are positioned, if not obligated, as few other institutions are, to be avenues for innovative thinking and solutions to global and

local problems (Faust, 2009; Hales, 2008; hooks; 1994/2014; Giroux, 2019; Mossman, 2018). As educational initiatives in the 21st Century shift their focus away from knowledge acquisition exclusively, and towards creativity, divergent thinking, and problem solving, similarities between contemporary pedagogies and historical theories of progressive education become apparent.

Education has become standardized, monetized, and motivated by profit over intellectual pursuits. The literature that I reviewed suggested that many of the challenges faced by higher education in the 21st Century may be the result an increased emphasis on profit and standardization, which diminishes the institution's ability to change its practices to better meet the needs of learners. In reviewing articles related to challenges in higher education, I came across an article by Amy Mossman (2018) entitled *Retrofitting the Ivory Tower: Engaging Global Sustainability Challenges Through Interdisciplinary Problem-Oriented Education, Research, and Partnerships in U.S. Higher Education*. Mossman's article synthesized research and scholarship across the fields of higher education reform and global sustainability to provide a snapshot of both topics that educators—across curriculum—ought to be addressing, as well as the barriers that are currently inhibiting these institutions from being agents of change in our world. In light of the items specified by this report, Mossman argues that institutions of higher education are positioned like few other organizations to cultivate innovative solutions to today's problems.

In relationship to the challenges facing institutions of higher education in the 21st Century, increasing interest in, and influence of, profit are likely steering education away

from being an intellectual pursuit. Mossman references Faust (2009), who points out that universities are “caving to pressure” to align themselves with the interests of government and financial sponsors. Mossman also cites Sahlins (2009), who argued:

The university is in need of reform, if not revolution. It will not come from boards of trustees and captains of erudition whose main qualifications and functions consist of raising money, for which purpose they are prepared to treat the intellectual organization of the university as the pecuniary means of a business enterprise. (p. 1017)

Such a statement bares a striking similarity to John Andrew Rice’s (n.d) decry of the traditional role of a board of trustees nearly a century ago, where he argued that schools ought to be run by people who know something about education, rather than boards of trustees (p. 24 of this document).

Further underscoring the ways in which financial motivations can compromise the integrity of institutions of higher education, Mossman cites LeMenager and Foote (2012), who noted that students have been “turned into a class of people valued as customers and virtually ignored as intellectuals in all but a handful of schools” (p. 576). Not only does such an institutional approach diminish potential for innovation, for both teachers and learners, but it also undercuts any efforts at cultivating a student-centered and problem-centered approach to education, both of which are founding principles in critical pedagogy and progressive education. Mossman (2018) cites Mulkey (2012), who argued, “we can save both this planet and higher education by developing liberal arts curricula that have sustainability education as a foundation” (p. 356). In this way, a curricular focus on sustainability can be seen as an

opportunity to revitalize education in light of our changing social and environmental contexts.

Mossman (2018) argued that, amidst these significant barriers and challenges, educators are presented with “exciting opportunities where a focus on sustainability and interdisciplinary collaboration could result in innovative solutions that are economically advantageous, environmentally beneficial, and socially enriching for universities and colleges, their students and their communities” (p. 51). As such, the challenges that we face as a society in the 21st Century ought to be seen as a primary driver of curricular decisions and may even revitalize and rejuvenate higher education in light of our contemporary context.

Scholars have noted the ways that the structures embedded within educational systems often limit growth and progress on university campuses. Gearhart, Miller, and Nadler (2018) argue that “higher education systems, and indeed state coordinating bodies, seem to want their organization to be all things to all constituents” (p. 33), meaning they wish to control all aspects of operation, while also leaving campuses free to make their own decisions and pursue their own directions. In light of the above listed challenges, many educators have called for a restored focus on quality teaching practices as a means by which to engage students and design curriculum that relevant and meaningful (Edwards, 2018). Another facet of higher education in the 21st Century that has transformed contexts of teaching and learning is distance education. Scholars investigating teaching and learning online suggest that emerging communication technologies are fundamentally reshaping

distance education and therefore may necessitate new strategies for teaching and learning. Arasaratnam-Smith and Northcote (2017) suggest that, in light of new communication technologies, educators must think carefully about whether or not to impose existing teaching practices in new contexts. They identify four factors that distinguish teaching and learning online from face-to-face contexts: 1) student control, 2) opportunities for new forms of social presence, 3) new styles of social discourse and dialogue, and 4) increased “measures of independence and agency” (p. 192). In this way, teaching and learning online can be described as involving an entirely new set of communications practices, which may require educators to rethink and re imagine best practices.

Scholars studying educational technology through a critical pedagogical lens have argued that tools *can* be used to humanize educational processes, however most technology integration efforts seem to prioritize economy over the quality of a learning experience. Amy Bradshaw (2017) cautioned that a school’s “most common priorities are efficiency, efficacy, appeal, reliability, cost effectiveness, and scalability” (p. 13). Given the mission and objectives of critical pedagogy, the priorities of educational technology stated here seem incongruous. In fact, in a table Bradshaw presents describing the “contrasts between critical pedagogy and educational technology,” technology is only seen as a tool of simplification, reproducibility, and objectification (p. 18-19). Bradshaw’s concerns seem well aligned with the previously described profit-focused challenges facing higher education—and surrounding commercial industries—in the 21st Century. Importantly, as a critique of Bradshaw’s work, I noted that the characteristics she describes make no reference to teaching and learning at

all—much less aesthetics and storytelling—but rather to infrastructure, efficiency, and consistency.

Locating Progressive Pedagogies in the 21st Century

Scholars today are exploring a range of ways that educators can enact critical practices in contemporary settings (Boyd, 2016; Gitlin & Ingerski, 2018; Kellner & Share, 2007a; Mihailidis, 2011; Peppler, Halverson, & Kaffia, 2016; Peppler & Kaffia, 2007; Portelli & Eizadirad; 2018). In K-12 educational settings, the surge of enthusiasm that swelled after Dewey's Lab Schools diminished greatly by the end of the 20th Century. In the literature I have reviewed related to contemporary practices of critical and progressive pedagogies, scholars report that enthusiasm faded largely due to educational reports like *A Nation At Risk* (1983) and federal initiatives like *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) and the *Common Core* (Gambone, 2017; Garte, 2017). In describing the consequences of these top-down educational mandates, Henry Giroux (2016) cited John Tierney's (2013) commentary on the state of education that was published in the *Atlantic*:

Policies and practices that are based on distrust of teachers and disrespect for them will fail. Why? 'The fate of reforms ultimately depend on those who are the object of distrust.' In other words, educational reforms need teachers' buy-in, trust, and cooperation to succeed; 'reforms' that kick teachers in the teeth are never going to succeed. Moreover, education policies crafted without teacher involvement are bound to be wrongheaded. (p. 352)

During the time that these policies were in place, education in the United States became increasingly geared toward the transmission of knowledge. As a result, the progressive

practices that teachers value, such as asking questions, scrutinizing information and sources, and even self-expression, became undermined and discouraged.

Building upon a desire to empower students in their learning, Giroux (2016) urged teachers to develop practices that encourage the exploration of divergent answers and possibilities. He argued that education through critical pedagogy could “provide students with the knowledge, modes of literacy, skills, critique, social responsibility, and civic courage needed to enable them to be engaged critical citizens willing to fight for a sustainable and just society” (p. 358). For Giroux, equity and justice can only be developed in the world when learners are engaged in analyzing, critiquing, and actively engaging in the world around them.

Building upon the educational values outlined by Giroux (2016), Little (2013) found striking resemblance the framework of 21st Century Skills (Ravitz, et. al, 2012) and the values established by progressive educators in the 20th Century. Little makes the case that, unlike the knowledge acquisition focus of the “previous generation” (p. 3), the qualities identified in the Framework for 21st Century Skills are very much in line with the values of a progressive education. Little identified seven essential qualities of the Framework that most align with the philosophy of progressive education: 1) project based learning, 2) critical thinking, 3) cooperative learning, 4) individual instruction, 5) self-direction and independence, 6) global competencies and awareness, and 7) using technology as a learning tool (Little, 2013). In light of these qualities, Little argues that while the term “progressive

education” may not be seen as prominent educational philosophy in the 21st Century, many of the values espoused in its philosophy are still central to educational frameworks today. Critical media literacy has also emerged as a mechanism through which to engage in the analysis and critique of contemporary media texts for the purposes of identifying structures of power and cycles of oppression. Kellner and Share (2007c) offer the following description of critical media literacy as a field of study:

Critical Media Literacy. . . focuses on ideology critique and analyzing the politics of representation of crucial dimensions of gender, race, class, and sexuality; incorporating alternative media production; and expanding textual analysis to include issues of social context, control, resistance, and pleasure. A critical media literacy approach also expands literacy to include information literacy, technical literacy, multimodal literacy, and other attempts to broaden print literacy concepts to include different tools and modes of communicating (Kellner, 1998). In addition to these elements, critical media literacy challenges relativist and apolitical notions of most media education in order to guide teachers and students in their exploration of how power and information are always linked. (p. 62)

Kellner and Share use the metaphor of an iceberg for describing the ways in which critical media literacy leads to, “an exploration of the role of language and communication to define relationships of power and domination because below the surface of that iceberg lies deeply embedded ideological notions of white supremacy, capitalist patriarchy, classism, homophobia, and other oppressive myths” (p. 62). Kellner and Share (2005) cautioned that critical media literacy, “is not a pedagogy in the traditional sense.... It requires a democratic pedagogy which involves teachers sharing their power with students as they join together in the process of unveiling myths and challenging hegemony” (p. 373). In this way, critical media literacy is seen as an extension of critical pedagogy, and serves as a mechanism for

examining the ways that cycles of oppression are related to our mediated society in the 21st Century.

Moving forward in the 21st Century, if educators wish to foster critical, creative, and compassionate values within their curriculum, then they must, in turn, also seek to do so in ways that embrace contemporary culture and depart from the authoritarian educational structures of the past.

Creativity in Education

Imagination means singing to a wide invisible audience. It means receptivity to the creative unconscious, the macrocosmic mind, the artistic mind. It makes erotic philosophers of us, as we imagine the world in images that make whole. To imagine is to give birth to—to embody the spirit in word and picture and behavior. The world will change when we can imagine it differently, and, like artists, do the work of creating new social forms. (M.C. Richards, 1996, p. 119)

As illustrated in the quote above by BMC faculty M. C. Richards, our imaginations make us “whole,” and the use of creativity in education can be seen as vital to the pursuit of cultivating meaningful learning experiences in the 21st Century. At BMC, the arts were central, but they were not the sole curriculum. Instead, they were considered a way of seeing the world, and of making meaning of our experiences as taken in through our five senses. Through the arts, students learned to appreciate representation while also developing the ability to apply aesthetic techniques for a range of professional, social, and personal purposes.

When describing the need for creativity in teaching and learning, world leaders have pointed to the ever-shifting, uncertain, and often volatile global context which students will

enter upon graduation (United Nations, 2015). They argue that the changing nature of our social, political, economic, and environmental landscapes will demand innovative thinking and problem solving capabilities of future generations. Similarly, Howard Gardner (1992; 2003) argued that intelligence is comprised of a range of capacities for reasoning, deducing, and problem solving that span beyond any singular aptitude.

Echoing the beliefs of these world leaders, Gibson (2010) stated that education can no longer solely serve the purpose of knowledge acquisition. He argued that creativity is essential in developing higher order thinking skills and in gaining proficiency in applying curricular knowledge to real-world situations.

Sotiropoulou-Zormpala (2012) described the important role creativity plays in helping teachers to develop their practice. She noted:

The arts can acquire a new role, that of a “spotlight” that illuminates alternative aspects of knowledge. A new kind of teaching can be inaugurated in which [learners] are called upon to participate in situations pertaining to the aesthetic traits of each taught subject. In other words, each taught subject can be treated as a possible framework within which a [student] may have aesthetic experiences. (p. 125)

She pointed to two ways in which the arts have historically been perceived in education: 1) teaching the arts, and 2) teaching through the arts, and then proposed a third form of creativity in education that she referred to as “aesthetic teaching.” Similar to the educational philosophy of BMC, she writes that in aesthetic teaching, “art is not separated from life: every taught subject is either interpreted as an aesthetic object or acts as a springboard for aesthetic work” (p. 127). In this way, the arts and aesthetic teaching serve as a means by which to recognize the interdisciplinarity of all subjects and the expressive potential of all

learners. She also cautioned that creativity in education requires a greater amount of time and “space” (p. 127) to be left open in the curriculum and to be filled by the organic and original ideas generated by both teachers and learners. Although seemingly risky, and counter-intuitive to the increasingly structured models of education today, aesthetic teaching can be seen as an essential ingredient in fostering innovation and problem solving and educational experiences.

Scholars exploring the role of creativity in classrooms of the 21st Century have noted the challenges of measuring, or even gauging levels of creativity. Marqui, Radan, and Liu (2017) examined all publicly available course outlines from one Canadian university to determine the extent to which student creativity was referenced. They found a range of implicit and explicit references to student creativity in course outlines, but also noted an increased resistance to notions of student creativity across STEM courses.

Lille and Romero (2017) explored the assessment of creativity in maker-based projects in teacher preparation. They note that a maker-based curriculum can support creativity in the classroom without detracting from the acquisition and retention of key curricular information. Further, they conclude that modeling creative educational experiences to preservice teachers encouraged creative thinking and collaborative processes.

Surveys conducted amongst university students and faculty report that creativity is valued in education, however there is disagreement between the groups as to whether or not it is present in courses. Gaspar and Mabic (2015) conducted a study in which participants self-reported on the presence of creativity in the classroom. They found that although faculty

generally rated their teaching as creative and student centered, students described classes as less creative and less valuing of their opinions and ideas. Similarly, Ehtiyar and Baser (2019) reported that students found creativity to be important in their education and to their future careers, yet described creativity as “underestimated and not given considerable attention” (p. 125) in their university experiences. Such studies indicate that universities may need to do more to prepare their faculty to integrate creativity into their curriculum.

In exploring faculty perceptions of creativity in higher education, de Alencar and Oiveira (2016) found teachers perceived creativity as important for helping students develop divergent thinking and problem solving skills, but argued that countless institutional barriers exist that prevent its implementation. Jahnke, Haertel, and Wildt (2017) categorized creative practices in education into a 6-Facet-Model, with creativity being expressed as: 1) student self-reflection, 2) independent decisions, 3) through curiosity and motivation, 4) producing something, 5) multiperspectives, and 6) when students develop original new ideas. The authors argue that while no consensus was reached regarding what qualifies as creativity, they did note that its influence was evenly dispersed across the six categories listed above.

Recently, scholars have expanded thinking about the role of art and creativity in education by investigating teaching as an aesthetic practice. In defining creativity as an element to be valued and cultivated in teaching and learning, scholars have underscored a need for innovation, imaginative ideas, empathy, and problem solving. Gibson (2010) cites Elliot Eisner (2005) in highlighting key features creative development as, “ boundary pushing, inventing, boundary breaking and aesthetic organizing. She describes creative

teaching as “disciplined improvisation” (609) in that it requires “structure” and “flexibility”(p. 610). By maintaining structure, while also remaining open to spontaneity, teachers foster an atmosphere of encouragement, support, and playful learning. Each of which compels active participation and creative thinking by students.

Creative teaching is perhaps seen as most in line with critical pedagogy due to its emphasis on critical thinking, problem solving, and collaboration. Gibson (2010) argued that creativity in education—for teachers and learners—is inherently subversive, as “it runs counter to many of the dominant influences in current higher education learning” (p. 607). In this way, a capacity for generating and expressing original ideas generally serves to disrupt dominant structures and normative ideology. She encourages faculty in higher education to design learning experiences that allow for “risk-taking” (p. 610) and calls upon the “active voice” (p. 610) and “problem solving” (p. 610) skills of learners.

Scholars have investigated the ways in which teaching aesthetic skillsets in faculty development can lead to increased performance in effective teaching. Eslamian, Jafari, and Neyestani (2017) found that teaching aesthetic skills to faculty helped them make noticeable gains in their teaching performance. They found that faculty improved in six previously identified areas of effective teaching: “designing teaching strategies, implementation of teaching strategies, classroom management, human relationships, evaluation, and desirable personality traits” (p. 99). They conclude that these practices are so lacking in higher education, that “even basic utilization of these skills by professors in their teaching and communication with students could significantly develop their effective teaching

performance” (p. 100). In this way, the training of aesthetic teaching skills can be seen as an important area of focus for faculty development.

Discussions about the relationship between art and education can be traced back to the founding principles of progressive education. Jones and Risku (2015) position the works of John Dewey relative to the contemporary climate for arts education in public schools.

They write:

The visual arts experience enables learning, and this experience of understanding and knowing is the process that shapes lives. Dewey stated that it is by way of communication that art becomes the incomparable organ of instruction, but the way is so remote from that usually associated with the idea of education that we are repelled by any suggestion of teaching and learning in connection with art. (p. 78)

The sentiment that contemporary education seems to “repel” any notion of arts integration across the curriculum can be seen as a product of increased structure and bureaucratization across institutions of learning. As creative thinking and artistic forms of expression encourage divergence from normative beliefs and systems of value structures, they not only run counter to dominant ideologies, but also represent increased challenges for assessment.

Histories of Black Mountain College

In his book, *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community*, Martin Duberman (1972/2009) described BMC founder John Andrew Rice as an individual with an outspoken passion for experiential learning. Rice was not one to beg for money, but in the summer of 1933 while attempting to establish the college, he found himself making the rounds to wealthy donors in New England—including the Carnegie and Rockefeller foundations (Duberman, 1972/2009; Reynolds, 1998). He hoped to start a democratic and progressive

institution of learning and, although desperate for funding, Rice was uncompromising in his commitment to launching the College without any preconceived structure.

They asked for specific plans, charts, graphs—the conventional guarantees, in other words, that a “responsible” project was about to be launched. Rice resolutely refused to give them. When the foundation men politely asked why (hinting that some modest *pro forma* acquiescence might suffice) Rice, somewhat less politely, replied that the more carefully drawn the plans of what was to be, the less it would be, since “above the level of bricklaying” it was impossible, or at the least unwise, to codify human behavior. He added that he couldn’t honestly say that he fully knew what the new college should try to be, and to the extent he did know, wasn’t at all sure it would work. (p. 15)

Although ultimately denied funding by all potential donors on this trip, Duberman describes Rice as taking comfort in standing by his values, and in the knowledge that, “his ‘presentation’ so impressed two foundation secretaries that they offered to resign their jobs and come down to Black Mountain to work without salary” (p. 15). Such exchanges exemplify the devotion and commitment that Rice and other founders felt for their quest to create an authentic environment for teaching and learning where experiential, experimental, and democratic education could thrive.

Opening its doors in 1933, Black Mountain College (BMC) was an institution of teaching, learning, and democratic living that offered a vision of education that was at once bold and simple. From its idyllic location nestled in the mountains of Western North Carolina, to its non-traditional practices, to the dedicated educators who graced its campus, the BMC was considered to be an authentic example of progressive education, although Rice despised the label (Reynolds, 1998, p. 145). John Dewey even hailed the College a “living example of democracy in education” (Dewey, 1940, p. 1).

In his introduction to the special Black Mountain College edition of the *Appalachian Journal*, Joseph Bathanti (2017) describes its legacy and significance:

attempting to quantify place as influence is tricky, yet the lasting magic of what sprang forth at ‘the back of beyond’—its contributions to visual art, literature, architecture, music, dance, literature, philosophy, its spirit of experimentation and collaboration, and the blazing social conscience it modeled for the 20th Century and beyond—during its 24-year tenure in the Swannanoa Valley is indisputable. (p. 220)

While it may be difficult to fully grasp the magnitude of the spirit of innovation, creativity, and community that thrived for over two decades at BMC, we can and should explore this rich context for relevance and inspiration in our own time.

Until its closing in 1957, BMC represented a “lighthouse of modernism” (Billy Schumann, personal communication, January 9th, 2019) deep in the heart of the Swannanoa Valley. The BMC was founded by John Andrew Rice along with a handful of academic “dissidents” (About Black Mountain College, n.d.; Fisher, 2014)—and 23 students—who sought to create a school for experiential education. Rice was a brilliant and sharp-tongued educator with a love and propensity for Socratic dialogue. Rice incited lively, if not contentious, debate wherever he went (Reynolds, 1998). Educational practices at BMC were deeply aligned with the values of progressive education and experiential learning, and in such a context, students were given complete responsibility and control over the what’s, when’s, and how’s of their learning (Duberman, 1972/2009; Reynolds, 1998; Rice, 1933). Rice did not intend the College to be an art school, however he worked to ensure that artistic approaches and perspectives were central components of the curriculum. As such, Rice (1933) encouraged all students—regardless of their area of study—to enroll in courses in

creative areas of study, including: music, painting, sculpture, dance, and writing. Although the arts were central to the curriculum, they were not the sole, or even primary, curriculum being studied. Courses at BMC were offered across a range of areas of study, including: philosophy, history, literature, and economics. The only subject said to be challenging to study at BMC was science, for they were not well supplied with materials like microscopes (Duberman, 1972/2009; Reynolds, 1998). In this way, BMC offered a learning environment where students could engage simultaneously in practices of developing their moral, aesthetic, and professional capacities.

During its existence, BMC was home to some of the most innovative and renowned thinkers and doers of the day. Buckminster Fuller refined the design of his landmark Geodesic Domes while teaching about them at a summer institutes in 1948 and 1949 (Thomson, 2017, p. 482) and Josef Albers developed his color theory and renowned teaching practices. To this day, the pedigree of creative talents coming out of this rural and remote place continues to impresses and influence scholarship (Bathanti, 2017). Although many people who might be considered famous graced the BMC campus, former student Fielding Dawson noted, “we were all famous, you just have never heard of us” (Albright, 2017, p. 224). In this spirit, Dawson felt that BMC prepared students like him to value themselves and their ideas, and to trust in their ability. Josef Albers said that unlike the Bauhaus, BMC was not aiming to produce designers, or to “fill museums” (Chaddock, 2017, p. 350). Based on my review of literature related to the spirit of education at BMC, I would add that the point

was not to leave famous, but rather to leave with the knowledge of how to live a just, moral, and self-actualized life.

Rice—a friend of progressive education pioneer John Dewey—extolled the virtues of experiential learning while cautioning of imposter schools, with teachers and administrators whom he described as progressive education “doctrinaires” (Duberman, 1972/2009, p. 24; Reynolds, 1998, p. 145). In her biography titled *Visions and Vanities*, Katherine Reynolds (1998) paints an image of John Andrew Rice’s contempt for imposters of progressive education, and his idea of what education ought to be. According to Reynolds, Rice claimed that students are not the ones who set the course of study, but rather:

. . . as is more usually the case, the institution mold[s] the values. This was felt with special force with regard to education—which was, after all, central to Black Mountain’s founding and to its sense of common purpose. The trouble with “progressive” educators, Rice felt, was that they were doctrinaires: “They’ve got the thing laid out. This is the way to do it. And by God if you don’t do it that way you’re not It.” After a visit in 1934 to the Lincoln School, one of the bastions of progressive education, Rice decided the place was all but lifeless, “running on something that happened a good while back”; and “one of the appalling disclosures” of his visit was that “‘progressive education’ when it is stupid, is much more stupid than the other kind.” (p. 145)

Rice’s critique suggests that the popularity of progressive education resulted in many misguided approaches, where a student’s ideas and interests were not positioned at the center of the educational experience. Reynolds continued by describing Rice’s mistrust in some progressive educators and subsequent frustration with the notion of being an “educated” person:

The certainty of the current crop of progressive educators perverted, in Rice’s view, the whole spirit of their alleged master, John Dewey—a man Rice knew personally

and admired enormously (Dewey was to visit Black Mountain Several times). Dewey understood, Rice felt, that “to arrive at a conclusion was not to arrive at a conclusion, it was to arrive at a pause. And you would look at the pause, you would look at the plateau, and then you would see another thing to climb.” Education, in this view, was never completed, and so it was nonsense to talk, as Robert Hutchins did, of the “educated man.” What a term!, Rice scoffed: “educated” is “a perfect passive participle,” perfect because it’s over with, passive because you had nothing to do with it. (p. 24)

These comments underscore Rice’s candor, and the intent with which he structured the founding documents of the BMC. Rice believed that schools must allow the needs of individuals and the community to prescribe the terms and conditions of a school. If learning is a lifelong pursuit, then a student’s tenure at the BMC must be considered a stepping stone within the much grander scheme of the entirety of their lives, and therefore should be shaped by their interests. As such, the needs, interests, and strengths of individual students must be prioritized in the curriculum.

The purpose of the college. In a document entitled *Proposal for an Organic Democracy* (n.d; see Appendix B) the purposes of education at BMC are laid out explicitly:

First, the purpose of the college is centered in the growth or development of the individual. Second, the organization of the college should be based on the conception of a small, closely-knit, highly cooperative, co-educational community. The third idea, implicit in the first two, is that the development of the individual can be greatly promoted by his taking part in the functions of the community, and that he should be encouraged to assume responsibility in it. (para. 1)

This document positions BMC as an institution of learning where the maturation and consciousness of the individual was informed by their connection to the larger community.

Similarly, in the document entitled *The Purpose of the College* (1933, See Appendix C), the BMC’s structure is articulated as granting maximum authority to students in crafting

a personal vision for their education. I found this document particularly useful in identifying the guiding philosophy of BMC, as it describes the College's purpose as driven by creativity, critical thinking, and mindfulness. In particular, the words "creative consciousness," found in the first sentence, represent my understanding of the underlying educational philosophy at BMC. The use of the word "creative" suggests both a valuing of original ideas and a focus on understanding aesthetic forms of representation and expression. The word "consciousness" points to a firm grounding in—and presence to—one's surrounding environment, community, and place in time. Collectively, these words describe the College's goal of producing moral citizens, attuned to addressing personal and community needs, in present and future contexts. Importantly, the *Purpose of the College* document also portrayed teachers as guides, rather than authorities, for those who are "eager to know, to will, and to do." In this way, student interest and autonomy drove the spirit of teaching and learning at BMC. Each of the above characteristics exemplifies ideal—and I would add difficult to achieve—practices in a progressive education.

Organizational documents related to the mission of the BMC consistently champion the role of creativity and the arts in education, and of education as a lifelong process. In John Andrew Rice's (1933) document *Organizing and Procedure: Black Mountain College*, he describes the integration of the arts in the curriculum as relevant not only to the artist, but also "to every other kind of human activity" (p. 4). This document concludes with a powerful note about the purposes of education and what a student who graduates—or simply moves on—from BMC ought to leave with.

Even if the student passes the final exam brilliantly, we do not propose to perpetuate a grim joke by calling him an educated man... But to send out from the College people who have acquired some ability in handling the material of the intellectual world and, more importantly still, handling themselves in relation to other people. (p. 5-6)

I find this passage to illuminate the underlying values of BMC succinctly, in that it describes education as a verb, rather than a noun, and professes the aims of education to be the (male) cultivation of skillsets for the purposes of solving problems and relating to the communities we inhabit. Importantly, although several of these founding documents used the word “male” in reference to students, generally BMC has been considered a refuge for inclusion and advocacy: championing the rights of women, people of varying sexual preferences, people of color, and people fleeing persecution (Williams & Bathanti, 2017).

As a means of ensuring academic freedom and that student interests remained sacred to the mission of BMC, the school operated without a board of trustees. In its place, a group of Faculty Fellows—designated by faculty and students—along with the College’s Rector (president) and an elected group of four student representatives, made all governance decisions. In a document titled *Notes About Teachers and Trustees*, Rice (n.d.) defended the school’s reasoning and condemned the state of higher education broadly:

In America, the center of responsibility in education has shifted in time from the faculty to the board of trustees. When the history of education in America in the 20th Century comes to be written, the most significant fact to be recorded will be that, by that time, the center of responsibility had already shifted from those who know something about education, the teachers, to those who really know nothing, the trustees. (para. 1)

Rice’s comments highlight the ways in which the structure of the BMC was set up to discourage bureaucracy, to encourage democracy, and to promote quality practices of

teaching and learning. Further, as described later in this chapter, his comments also foreshadow the increasing bureaucratization from which higher education would suffer in the years to come. I find it almost haunting that Rice was complaining about the dangers of the corruption of education nearly one hundred years ago.

Student life at Black Mountain College. Being a student at BMC required boundless responsibility and autonomy, yet few formal structures were imposed to dictate how students went about their scholarship. In describing the ambiguities confronting students at BMC, Duberman (1972/2009) writes:

In the thirties, about the sum and substance of the community's formula for good living was: 'Be intelligent!' But each year, with shifts in personnel, there were inevitable shifts in the community's sense of what 'intelligent' meant. As one man said to me, 'one of the difficulties was that we were Adam every year,' never feeling bound by the consensus of the previous group—that is, to the extent consensus had been achieved and was known. (p. 82)

As a result, some students reported feeling unnerved by the freedom presented to them at the school, while others embraced the challenge were empowered by the unprecedented freedom to explore, learn, and grow.

Grades were kept by faculty at BMC but not shared with students. They were kept in case a student wished to transfer or, rarely, applied to graduate. Faculty instead provided feedback to students with extensive evaluations on the quality and character of their work (Duberman, 1972/2009). Evidence of the caliber of student' work, efficacy, and growth determined whether or not they would be invited back at the conclusion of an academic year (Duberman, 1972/2009; Reynolds, 1998; Rice, 1942/2014). Years after the College's

founding, and after gaining comfort with the structure-less structure, Duberman reported students even being upset and “angered,” (p. 100) upon seeking their transcripts, to find out that even some grading had occurred.

Education at BMC took many forms, and occurred in places ranging from ordinary to spectacular. Classes were held in traditional classroom spaces as well as outside amidst the grandeur of the Lake Edan Campus. Education also happened through a “work program” (Duberman, 1972/2009), where students contributed to the upkeep of the community through the preparation of meals, cleaning, and gardening. These experiences caring for the community may have been what Dewey (1940) was referring to when he offered praising remarks about the College.

At BMC, learning was a never ending experience. Classes were organized and scheduled in set time periods in the morning, providing perhaps more structure than any other part of a BMC day. At lunch time, deli meats and bread were set out so that people could make a sandwich and then quickly get back to their work. Afternoons typically began with intermural and exercise for underclass students, and independent work time for upper-class students who were entering focused and independent periods of study. The afternoons were also when students gave their time to the work program, doing gardening, farming, maintenance, and cleaning. Contributing time to the work program was always voluntary, yet students and teachers alike gave their time. Afternoon recreation, independent study, and work was followed by rest and then dinner in the dining hall. At dinner time, all members of the community came together to share food and conversation, often resulting in lively and

informal discussions and educational experiences. On some nights dinner would be followed by evening classes, which were scheduled to start after dinner so that they could go on as late into the night as the students and teachers wished. Other nights were dedicated to performances and the arts and students and faculty would sing, play music, or put on plays with one another.

Building upon the College's emphasis on academic freedom, students in their first year were encouraged to explore as many classes as they could in their first weeks before dedicating to a specific class schedule. As John Andrew Rice noted in his *Organizing and Procedures* (n.d.) document, "curiously, when no classes are required, too many classes are taken" (p. 1). His comment underscores the College's commitment to the interests of the individual, and provides insight into the ways in which a student's curiosity and drive might push them to try harder than any authority ever could.

Student accounts portrayed education at BMC as immersive and inspiring. In reading Joseph Bathanti's (2017) introductory article, *Magnetic ether: "the back of beyond,"* which serves as an introduction to the special edition of the *Appalachian Journal* on BMC, I came across a quote from Fielding Dawson's (1991) *Black Mountain Book*. Dawson described the splendor of life as a student in this magical environment: "where else could you sit on top of a mountain and look down through the clouds at the school you attended" (Bathanti, 2017, p. 218)? Such comments of wonder were common among the students of BMC, as much of the College's reputation as an ideal learning environment had to do with the mystique of its surroundings.

In a conversation recorded with her son pertaining to the time that she spent at Black Mountain College in 1944, Alma Stone Williams (2017)—valedictorian of Spelman College with master’s degree from Atlanta University who then enrolled at BMC to become the first woman of color to integrate a college in the south—described the caliber of the teachers and students she worked with during her time there:

PW: So these were top musicians? And you’ve said just how fantastic the music was.

ASW: Oh, my goodness, yes. Both in performance and in teaching. Because there was a lot that was different. Lowinski had a class in “New Roads in Music Education.” There was another called “What is Style in Music?” And there were two performance classes, one in cello-piano sonatas and another in just chamber music. We got to play all the great chamber music because there were people that could *play* them.

PW: So there were other players that were good, too?

ASW: Oh, yes. Like Ruby Geverts. Her father, I think, was in the New York Philharmonic? I’m not sure. He was a pastor. But she was a fantastic violin player. She used to take her violin out there on the steps. She could play all these violin concertos and other things. I mean, she was just all over the place. She was 16 years old, and she was the best one. (p. 612).

For me, the names and pedigrees of the musicians Alma Stone Williams described playing with illuminated the reputation BMC must have carried as a place of quality and excellence. Importantly, Williams also noted that “the college should be more fully recognized for its pioneering actions towards racial integration in the 1940s” (p. 612). In serving as a platform for equity and social justice decades ahead of the Civil Rights Movement, the BMC demonstrated its commitment to offering quality learning experiences to people of all races. To be sure, the staggering ethic of equity among race, gender, and sexual orientation at Black

Mountain College was ahead of its time in the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, and cannot be overemphasized.

Born in the south and the 18th Century. My path towards understanding the values that shaped the mission and purpose of the BMC came through first developing an understanding of the education and experiences of the College's founder, John Andrew Rice. The information I learned about Rice's history legacy came from a range of sources, including: a review of his (1942/2014) autobiography, Katherine Reynolds (1998) biography on Rice, Martin Duberman's (1972/2009) history of BMC, select articles from the Appalachian Journal's (2017) special quadruple edition, and Appalachian State University's digital archive of BMC documents (Black Mountain College: Innovation in Art, Education, and Lifestyle, n.d). Born in South Carolina in the year 1888, Rice's life—and educational philosophy—were deeply impacted by the perceptions of racial inequities he witnessed during his childhood (Duberman, 1972/2009; Reynolds, 1998; Rice, 1942/2014). As the nation experienced economic boom in the wake of the Industrial Revolution and the invention and expansion of railroads, it was also recoiling in the aftermath of the Civil War. Economic growth in oil and steel production was supported by an increasing flow of immigrant labor, coming primarily from Europe through the heyday of Ellis Island.

Rice's upbringing in the deep south gave him both a reverence for southern culture as well as an awareness of the structures of oppression operating within his back yard. Rice's early childhood was spent on a plantation in South Carolina, where he experienced the impact and influence racial segregation and became keenly conscious of the racial

discrimination and oppression that dominated the south. In her biography on the life and legacy of John Andrew Rice, Katherine Reynolds (1998) shared a story that illuminates the experiences with segregation that shaped his life and values:

The plantation summers became John Andrew Rice's earliest source of education, especially in the complex interrelations of gender and race. He learned that the girl cousins would join in games of sliding down hills of cottonseed or fighting mock battles for only so long before they reverted to the less frenetic arts of southern femininity. He noticed that the children of the former slaves were equal with the white children as they played together by day, but far separate when they scurried back to their family cabins in the woods at night. In the late afternoon, after a day during which black and white youngsters joined together happily as the knights or Indians of invented dramas, the arrival of the watermelon wagon signaled the time to withdraw, according to color, to different picnic tables—the white table being bigger and the first to get served. (p. 12-13)

This story conveys the subtle, yet uncompromising ways in which Rice observed discrimination play out in and around his home. Such experiences proved pivotal in Rice identifying as a Progressive and pursuing equality for all races throughout his education as a career.

Rice's appreciation for student-centered dialogic education began at an early age. As a boy, Rice received encouragement and inspiration from Uncle Melt, a former slave on the plantation with a gift of Socratic Dialogue who, in many ways, first inspired him to want to teach. Reynolds (1998) describes the influence these experiences had on Rice during his childhood:

For talk, John Andrew Rice singled out Uncle Melt, whom he credited with some of his earliest training in the art of dialogue. Uncle Melt's cabin, a wooden shack where the old former-slave resided, was a place to go and converse in "the inconsequential talk of the very old and the very young." Unlike uncle Remus, Uncle Melt (for Milton) told no stories, but he had a ready laugh and a readiness to listen to a young

boy's patter. His gift was in asking interesting questions; then he sat down to listen, nod, and suck on his corncob pipe as John Andrew spun his answers. (p. 13)

During his career as an educator, Rice was seen as a master of Socratic Dialogue, possessing the ability to ask questions and cultivate lively, if not heated, debate.

In 1905, at age sixteen, Rice went to high school at Wells School in Bell Buckle Tennessee, where he was first introduced to a student-centered model of education (Reynolds, 1998, p. 51). He described the school as a place where students were encouraged to work hard by exploring their own interests. In his view, this less structured form of education was a far more effective means by which to learn, as students were encouraged to take full responsibility for their learning.

Later, he studied as a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford University, where his appreciation for authentic and self-guided education continued. On his way to Oxford, Rice visited Germany to learn more about German universities and their models of education, which were a major influence in the United States. He describes these schools as “fatally flawed” (Reynolds, 1998, p. 5) with an emphasis on acquiring knowledge, rather than applying it. In his autobiography, Rice (1944) sympathized with American institutions of higher education being enamored with such a model, writing:

The method of their [German universities'] scholarship was something an American could put his teeth into, this getting at truth through facts and facts, welcome release from the heavy hand of the theologian, to whom education in this country was still mortgaged and for whom the poet alone was a match. But poets were not frequent and could not be made, while scholars could, and Germany was the place; and until such time as the American graduate school could get in to mass production, a degree from Berlin or Leipzig was a safe investment. (p. 261)

Experiencing first-hand the presence of racism, discrimination, and oppression likely drew Rice to value educational processes where students were positioned as leaders and poets. Later in his career—in establishing the educational philosophy of BMC—Rice was able to put into practice a system of education where students were encouraged to think for themselves and were given nearly complete control over their educational process.

The Black Mountain College Semester

In 2018, Appalachian State University hosted the Black Mountain College Semester (BMCS), which served as nearly a year long endeavor and tribute to the spirit and legacy of Black Mountain College (BMC). Occurring at locations both on and off campus, the BMCS hosted guest speakers, documentary films, gallery exhibits, creative workshops, and participatory educational experiences to commemorate the Black Mountain College and its emphasis on education—through the arts—for democracy. Eight faculty from Appalachian State University were accepted as Fellows and augmented a specific course they teach to include aspects of the people, place, curriculum, and pedagogy of the BMC. These Faculty Fellows developed assignments intended to help students explore relevant curriculum topics while considering the significance and wider context of the BMC, and the students, teachers, and staff who inhabited it. Spanning a range of curricula, including architecture, design, performative dance, and media studies, students in courses taught by Faculty Fellows participated in projects designed in the image of the BMC and the legacy of its esteemed alumni. The works of these students will be shared through the Digital Timeline located on the BMCS website (n.d.). The BMCS was sponsored by the Office of Academic Affairs and

the College of Arts and Sciences at Appalachian State University and was established in partnership with the Turchin Center for the Visual Arts, Blowing Rock Art & History Museum, Swannanoa Valley Museum & History Center, the Center for Appalachian Studies and the Department of English at Appalachian. According to the BMCS website, the Semester seeks to, “highlight the importance of BMC’s influence within the Appalachian region’s creative, educational and political movements” and “expand the University’s presence in the arts and humanities communities of North Carolina and the Appalachian region” (BMCS at Appalachian, 2018).

Summary

The scholarly texts in this chapter inform the way I approach my dissertation research exploring progressive education in the 21st Century. In compiling this literature, I have been struck by the similarities between critical and creative practices in higher education today and the philosophy of progressive education and experiential learning as practiced at BMC nearly one hundred years ago. Each humanized, even spiritualized (inspired), the curriculum and students’ educational experiences through arts-based practice. Each changes the dynamic of the educational experience from passive to active, from emphasizing memorization and regurgitation, to nurturing problem solving, collaboration, and creativity. At the BMC, the teacher ceased to be the all-knowing source of information in the room and instead served as a co-learner and sometimes co-creator along with students.

In the following chapter, I discuss the methodology I used in my dissertation research. I describe the ways in which the aforementioned theories of progressive education,

experiential learning, and critical pedagogies shape the ways I approached both the formulation of my research questions as well as the questions I posed to participants during our informal conversations. In this way, progressive education served as both the theoretical underpinnings of BMC, the BMCS, and my personal philosophy on education and 21st Century Citizenship.

Chapter 3

Methodology: Traversing Qualitative Methods

In this chapter, I describe the qualitative methods used during my dissertation research exploring the Black Mountain College Semester (BMCS) at Appalachian State University that occurred in the Spring 2018. I lay out the design of my study, including the selection of participants, data collection procedures, and data analysis process, as well as discussing the role of my own subjectivity in informing my research perspective. I conclude by discussing the ways that my theoretical approach to this research is framed by my work in the fields of experiential education and media studies.

Rationale for Research Approach

This study employs a qualitative research design as a means of best representing the stories and perspectives of my participants. During the fall 2018 and spring 2019 semesters, I conducted ten interviews with seven Faculty Fellows of the BMCS and three of the coordinators involved in organizing the event. The purpose of these interviews was threefold: to hear stories of the experiences that led each person towards a career in education, to hear descriptions of the ways in which each person tries to facilitate learning experiences, and to learn how each person feels that we—as educators—can best prepare our students to face the challenges and opportunities of the 21st Century.

Research Context

The BMCS occurred during the spring of 2018 and was anchored on Appalachian State University's campus with special events extending into surrounding area venues. It brought a series of guest speakers, performances, gallery curations, art installations, and integrated classroom assignments to our local and regional communities. On the website promoting the Semester, the BMCS is described as serving to, "highlight the importance of BMC's influence within the Appalachian region's creative, educational and political movements" and "expand the University's presence in the arts and humanities communities of North Carolina and the Appalachian region" (BMCS at Appalachian, n.d.).

Conceptualized by the 2012-2014 Poet Laureate of North Carolina, Appalachian State professor of creative writing and inaugural McFarlane Family Distinguished Professor in Interdisciplinary Education, Joseph Bathanti, the BMCS was born out of a desire to bring forward the ideals of the BMC into a contemporary college community. In recent years, professor Bathanti has made the BMC a focal point and theoretical lens within his creative writing classes and his teaching broadly. He conceived the BMCS as a way to cultivate and grow similar experiences across Appalachian State University and the greater Western North Carolina area.

Research Sample and Data Sources

The historical context for my dissertation was Black Mountain College (BMC). Known as an institution that cultivated authentic progressive, democratic, and experiences education, the BMC served as both a historical fact and an ideological icon in my study. For

the purposes of my research, I considered the BMC to offer a foundational philosophy of education as a point of reference of contemporary educational endeavors.

The contemporary participants in my study were purposefully selected, and are comprised of coordinators and educators from the BMCS (See Table 1). Collectively, they represent a group of educators working in our present day to cultivate meaningful teaching and learning experiences in higher education. My conversations with these educators provided me with insight into the experiences and perspectives of educators today, as well as the ways in which educators might derive value from BMC as an institution. I also aimed to gain an understanding of any limitations in the application of a BMC approach to our present day teaching and learning context at a midsized university in the southeastern United States.

In addition to these contemporary participants, I also collected data from historic figures—visionary leaders, administrators, teachers, and students—that represent the vision and philosophy upon which BMC was founded. As I have come to know their stories and experiences through the historical texts written about the BMC, their stories have shaped my research in fundamental ways. My goal was to put these *voices from the past* into conversation with our *voices in the present*.

Participant Profiles



Figure 1. Portraits of BMCS Faculty Fellows and Coordinators

Tom Hansell is an associate professor in Appalachian Studies at Appalachian State University and is also the co-director of University Documentary Film Services. He also works with the Center for Appalachian Studies where he does outreach with a variety of community groups and non-profits throughout the region: working on sustainability and sustaining Appalachian culture. Documentary Film services—a student service organization—works in support students and faculty who are doing documentary production in their coursework. During the Black Mountain College Semester, Tom organized and managed the creation of a five-part mini documentary film series—displayed on the BMCS

Digital Timeline (n.d.)—which provided introductory information to students and faculty learning about Black Mountain College.

James Toub is a professor and chair for the Art Administration program and coordinator of the Art History program at Appalachian State University. He has been awarded the “University of North Carolina Excellence in Teaching Award, an ASU Student Government Excellence in Teaching Award, and the College of Fine and Applied Arts award for excellence in service to the University” (Meet Jim Toub, n.d.). As a Faculty Fellow during the BMCS, he customized a “Seminar in Art History” course to explore “the arts at Black Mountain College within the larger context of modern Euro-American art history” (Black Mountain College Fellows, n.d.).

Jeff Goodman is a Senior Lecturer in the Media Studies and Science Education programs in the department of Curriculum and Instruction at Appalachian State University. Jeff was a Faculty Fellow during the BMCS, where he augmented his class “Build it! Design Technology and Elementary STEAM Education” class to explore the work and legacy of BMC student Ruth Asawa.

Joseph Bathanti is a professor of creative writing in the Department of English at Appalachian State University. He is currently serving as the Writer in Residence and the McFarlane Family Distinguished Professor of Interdisciplinary Education at the Watauga Residential College (Watauga Residential College Faculty & Staff, n.d.). Professor Bathanti is perhaps best known as the 2012 – 2014 North Carolina Poet Laureate, the seventh ever awarded in the state. Joseph was also described as the person who initially envisioned and

organized the Black Mountain College Semester. In addition to organizing speakers and events across the region for the Semester, he also served as a special guest editor for the Appalachian Journal during the creation of their special quadruple volume edition of the Journal dedicated to Black Mountain College (Ballard & Bathanti, 2017).

Dr. Damiana Pyles is an Associate professor in Media Studies in the department of Curriculum and Instruction at Appalachian State University. Her research interests and teaching focus on “media production, identity, and media literacy practices” and teacher preparation (Damiana Pyles, n.d.). During the Black Mountain College Semester, Dr. Pyles augmented her Narrative, New Media, and Gaming class to explore and express the history, people, and stories of the BMC through the design of video game concepts.

Jason Miller is an Associate Professor and program director of Building Science in the department of Sustainable Technology in the Built Environment in the College of Fine and Applied Arts at Appalachian State. Through his work in sustainable technology and design, Jason has traveled with teams of student to compete nationally and international solar decathlon events. In the spring of 2019, two team’s from the IDEX Lab were selected as finalists in the U.S. Department of Energy’s 2019 Solar Decathlon Design Challenge in Golden, Colorado. During the Black Mountain College Semester, Jason augmented his Architecture Design Studio Class to explore the work of Buckminster Fuller during his time at Black Mountain College and to “develop comprehensive design proposals” for the outdoor roof terrace at Appalachian State’s Plemmon’s Student Union (BMCS Fellows, n.d.).

Dr. William (Billy) Schumann is an Associate professor of Appalachian Studies and the Director for the Center for Appalachian Studies at Appalachian State University (Center for Appalachian Studies, n.d.). His research and teaching interests relate to developing sustainability and community development in rural mountain areas, regionally as well as internationally (William Schumann, n.d.). Dr. Schumann was a primary driver and key coordinator during the Black Mountain College Semester: working on grant writing and interfacing with University and state officials to fund the project; organizing guest speakers, workshops and performances; and envisioning the Faculty Fellows and course integration component of the Semester.

Dr. Ray Miller is a professor and Interim Chairperson of the department of Dance Studies and Theatre Arts at Appalachian State University. Having “directed and/or choreographed over [two hundred] musicals, operas, plays and/or dance concerts” (Ray Miller, n.d.). Ray seeks to cultivate connections between studio and classroom spaces in his teaching practice. In 2013, he was the recipient of the Board of Governors Excellence in Teaching Award and he was also chosen to be a scholar for the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in 2010. During the Black Mountain College Semester, Ray augmented his Modern Dance History class to explore the collaborative work of musician Merce Cunningham and his collaborative composer John Cage. Students explored the techniques, styles, and methods of these two artists and scholars and applied what they learned in the development of their own techniques and approaches to modern dance.

Jody Servon is a professor in the department of Art in the College of Fine and Applied arts at Appalachian State University. Jody teaches in, and coordinates, the Art Management Program and she is also the SHARPE Chair of Fine and Applied Arts, where she works to develop programming and provide access to resources for a range of ages and populations. During the Black Mountain College Semester, Jody augmented her Art, Exhibitions, Practicum class to invite students to collaborate to “research art and artists who were in residence at BMC to create a series of online exhibitions based on their work during that time period” (BMCS Fellows, n.d.).

Dr. Christina Sornito is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Anthropology in the College of Arts and Sciences at Appalachian State University. Her primary research focuses include: “1) apocalypse, 2) shamanism (broadly known in the Philippines as *baybaylanism*), and 3) haunted landscapes of modernity and postcolonial legacies” (Christina Verano Sornito, n.d.). During the Black Mountain College Semester, Christina customized her Experimental Ethnography course to explore and perform Erik Satie’s ‘The Ruse of Medusa,’ which was “one of the first examples of surrealist drama, and performed for the first time in the English-language at BMC in 1948” (BMCS Fellows, n.d.).

Data Collection Methods

As a means of attending to the goals of my research, the data collection for this study centered around two distinct areas: 1) eleven audio-recorded, conversational interviews with Faculty Fellows and coordinators (see Appendix A for a list of interview questions); and 2) the analysis of primary and secondary source historical documents related to the BMC.

Interviews. In Table 1, I present a list of the participants in my study with their position at Appalachian State, role during the BMCS, and the date, location, and duration of each interview.

Table 1.

Data collection timeline

Interviewee	Position	Role during BMCS	Date, location, and Length of Conversation	In-Text Citation
Tom Hansel	Associate Professor of Appalachian Studies & Co-Director of Documentary Film Services	Creator of 5 part documentary series on the history and legacy of the BMC	September 11 th , 2018 Office in the Watauga Residential College 45 minutes	(TH)
James Toub	Professor, Assistant Chair, Program Coordinator Of Art History	Faculty Fellow	September 13 th , 2018 Office in the College of Arts and Sciences 1:48 minutes	(JT)
Jeff Goodman	Senior Lecturer in Media Studies and Science Education, Department of Curriculum & Instruction	Faculty Fellow	September 14 th , 2018 Cemetery behind College of Education 1:20 minutes	(JG)
Joseph Bathanti	Professor of Creative Writing, McFarlane Family Distinguished Professor in Interdisciplinary Education, Writer in Residence for the Watauga Early College	BMCS originator & Guest Editor of the Special Edition of the Appalachian Journal on the BMC	October 17 th 2018 Office in the Watauga Residential College 1:43 minutes	(JB)
Damiana Pyles	Associate Professor in Media Studies, Department of Curriculum & Instruction	Faculty Fellow	November 2 nd , 2018 Office in the College of Education 1:04 minutes	(DP)
Jason Miller	Associate Professor in the Building Science Program Director & Associate Professor, Department of Sustainable Technology and the Built Environment	Faculty Fellow	November 18 th , 2018 Office in Katherine Harper Hall 53 minutes	(JM)

William (Billy) Schumann	Associate Professor & Director of the Center for Appalachian Studies	BMCS Lead Coordinator	January 9 th , 2019 Solarium in Student Union 1:50 minutes	(WS)
Ray Miller	Professor of Dance and Theatre Studies	Faculty Fellow	January 9 th , 2019 Classroom in Chapel Wilson Hall 1:59 minutes	(RM)
Jody Servon	Professor & Program Coordinator, <i>Sharpe</i> Chair of Fine and Applied Arts	Faculty Fellow	January 22 nd , 2019 Office in Schaeffer Center for the Performing Arts 1:47 minutes	(JS)
Christina Sornito	Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology	Faculty Fellow	March 13 th , 2019 Office in Anne Belk Hall 51 minutes	(CS)
			Total hours of recorded interviews = 14 Total Pages of Interview Transcriptions = 186	

Interview protocol. During conversations with Faculty Fellows, our conversations were informal and emergent, and I attempted to develop an understanding of each person's educational philosophy and practices. Each interview followed a similar protocol: I began by welcoming the participant and asking them if they were still amenable to having their portrait images taken before the conversation began, and being audio recorded during our conversation. The opening photo/video portraiture provided me with a visual reference to each participant. Upon later reflection, I realized that these initial portraits also provided a way to clear the air before beginning the conversation. I began by taking approximately five to ten photographs of each participant in rapid succession. I chose to take a series of images, rather than just one or two, in an effort to possibly capture a subtle range of facial expressions. These photographic portraits were followed by a roughly sixty-second video portrait of the person standing still and looking into the lens, what I described as a *living portrait*. After capturing these visual materials, I assisted participants in attaching a lavalier microphone. Although I performed a preliminary audio adjustment in my office before the interview, I next asked participants to speak conversationally into the microphone so that I could ensure that a proper level had been set before we began. Utilizing Sony UWPD lavalier microphones during each interview recordings served two distinct purposes: 1) professional microphones offered clarity in audio quality, which was invaluable when working with data transcription and analysis; and 2) these recordings may be used in future creative productions after the completion of my dissertation: e.g. podcasts, exhibits, or possibly contributions to the BMCS Digital Timeline (n.d.). Once participants and I were

connected to microphones, I began recording audio and welcomed them to the conversation. Amusingly, conversations would often begin naturally before I could even press record, spinning off of our initial greetings as we first met and began chatting informally. These moments were at once charming and reassuring, as I knew that I was likely about to experience a rich conversation consisting of a wealth of potential topics. I would have to ask if I could take a moment to begin recording as we continued talking.

As is the case in qualitative research, each conversation proved started from a common point, but ultimately led to unique insights. In this way, each interview offered clues as to how I might best refine my practice for the next conversation. For example, after closely following the script of my interview questions (See Appendix A) during my first interview with Professor Tom Hansel, I gained an appreciation for the way a *purposeful grand tour question*—such as, How did you come to the profession of teaching?—provided a natural, almost effortless, point of entry into dialogue. Upon reflecting on this first interview, I noted the importance of this opening line of questioning and made sure to begin each subsequent interview in the same fashion. I found that by asking faculty in higher education how they came to the profession of teaching, each participant was able to discuss their personal connection with this common ground. As faculty in higher education often enter their careers as educators with extensive knowledge in their field of study, but less experience or education in the art of teaching, each person's story contributed a unique, yet convergent set of experiences.

This opening line of questioning often led to stories about chance opportunities that supported their decisions to enter teaching. I followed by asking participants to recall their first experiences teaching in their own classroom: How they perceived their role as teacher, and their perceptions of the role of students. In asking these opening questions, my goal was to establish each person's histories and past perceptions of the aims of education—and this information guided our conversations as to the ways that the past informs their present educational experiences and desires.

Building upon our opening conversations, I next asked participants to describe the spirit of their ideal classrooms and courses now. This question felt less exact to me than the opening questions, and as such I viewed their responses as insight into aspects of education they most greatly value. Participants responses to questions about the spirit of education in their courses varied greatly, based on a range of factors including the context of our conversation, their recent experiences, the type of courses that they teach, and the student populations with which they work. I viewed these questions as a means by which to learn about what matters most in education: what to teach, how to teach, and what they hope students remember long after the conclusion of a course.

Finally, after establishing the *why* and *how* of their present teaching practice—informed by the past (e.g. personal histories, teaching experiences and the history and legacy of the BMC)—I asked Faculty Fellows and coordinators to describe broadly their views on the aims of higher education, the role of democracy, creativity, and storytelling in education, and how we best prepare students to take their place [e.g. face the challenges and embrace

the opportunities] of personal and professional life in the 21st Century. Interestingly and appropriately, participants often answered these questions by referring back to things they had mentioned in previous portions of the conversation.

Importing and organizing interview data. After each conversation and audio recording with a participant, I would immediately—in several instances while still on location—import my audio and video files onto my computer to ensure that each item was captured successfully (e.g. photos, videos, participant and my audio files which were recorded separately). After importing, I backed my files up into multiple locations, including to an external hard drive and cloud-based storage. Importantly, I was not concerned with the security of my data, as the persons and places associated with my research were not confidential.

Through my experience and background in media production, I have learned the importance of recording each microphone input as a separate file. In this case, I recorded the participant and myself as two separate audio files. This way, if during playback and transcription, I find a participant's comments difficult to discern, I am able to mute my microphone and focus solely on the participants audio. While the extra step of recording each audio channel as a separate file greatly increases the efficiency of transcription, and the quality of any future creative production, doing so required creating a sequence in Premiere and synchronizing the audio files. Once the data from a conversation had been imported and organized on my computer and external hard drives, I then imported these audio and visual materials into Adobe Premiere, where I combined and synchronized the participant's audio

file with my own in a layered audio sequence to be transcribed and analyzed. In the data analysis section, I describe how I later utilized “markers” within Adobe Premiere to record notes and complete transcriptions of each conversation.

Document review. In a similar fashion, when exploring the histories of individuals related to the BMC, particularly John Andrew Rice and Josef Albers, I aimed to contextualize their experiences in a similar light, searching for what I perceived might be their perspectives, stories, and answers to my interview questions. In order to gain an understanding of how the Black Mountain College was founded, how it operated, and for insight into the values and opinions of its faculty, students, and staff, I reviewed and analyzed primary and secondary source documents related to the BMC itself. These primary source documents—some of which are housed exclusively in the special collections of Appalachian State University’s Belk Library—include items such as paper and digital copies of letters written by John Andrew Rice, and original documents related to the management, organization, and public relations of the BMC. These texts provide insight into the people, events, and organizational values of the BMC. As I presume is the nature with many historically contextualized research studies, the sheer volume of historic archival texts to which I have access proved overwhelming, and there was no time to review all items, nor were all items relevant. Therefore, my primary focus became working with select documents—such as the BMC mission statement, interviews with key individuals, and historical biographies—to establish an ideological framework for exploring the spirit of progressive education: past, present, and future.

Data Analysis Methods

I analyzed the data collected in this study using the qualitative method of thematic analysis (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012). A qualitative approach to research was an

ideal fit for this study as I sought to illuminate the nuanced stories and experiences of past and present educators. The goal of qualitative research is to assist scholars in unearthing new questions, new intricacies, and proposing new ways of understanding complex issues within a given topic (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As thematic analysis is an effective and commonly utilized practiced for illuminating broad patterns within qualitative data sets (Castleberry, & Nolen, 2018), I decided this approach would be ideal for mining the intricate and varied stories told by my participants.

The historic contextualization grounding my research prompted codes and themes to emerge from both contemporary and historical data. Therefore a portion of the codes and themes in my study—such as the relationship between structure and freedom in education—emerged from the philosophies and ideals of the BMC and the people who inhabited it. Other themes—such as cultivating curiosity—emerged from the stories of my contemporary participants, and were triangulated with—and contextualized by—the information I found in these historical documents.

Thematic analysis. I utilized a *thematic analysis* as a means by which to organize, filter, and make sense of the experiences of my participants. In her book *Becoming Qualitative Researchers*, Corrine Glesne (2011) argued that thematic analysis enables researchers to, “discern themes, patterns, processes, and to make comparisons and build theoretical explanations” (p. 194). In this way, thematic analysis enables researchers to draw connections across the stories of multiple participants and data sets.

Thematic analysis involves iterative phases related to the creation of codes and themes, beginning in the very initial stages of data collection (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012). The researcher begins to make sense of the data being collected by writing memos reflecting preliminary observations. Each new interview or field observation is therefore informed by the experiences and emerging themes from the previously collected data. As interviews, field notes, and observations accumulate, thematic data analysis begins transitions to creating tables in which to present and represent the emerging codes or themes. At some point during the process of organizing and indexing codes and themes, researchers begin to reach what is known as “data saturation” (Joffe, 2012) where all data points seem to express previously defined themes. At the point of data saturation, the researcher begins shifting focus to how the themes that emerged might best be represented or displayed with the research findings section of their report.

Innovations in data transcription. Scholars suggest that the act of transcription is not only necessary for grounding and conveying research findings, but is also an essential means by which to get to know the stories of your data (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Joffe, 2012;). Echoing these sentiments, I found the act of transcription to be an essential first-step in exploring, discovering, and learning from the stories and ideas shared by Faculty Fellows and BMCS coordinators. In total, the fourteen hours of conversations I recorded amounted to one hundred and eighty six pages of transcriptions.

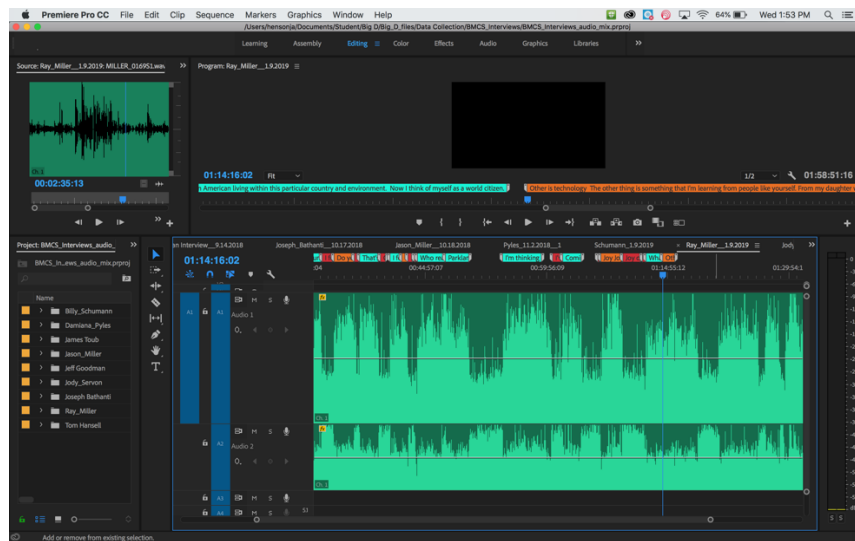


Figure 2. Screenshot of my data transcription process. This figure shows how I used Adobe Premiere Pro CC as a platform for data transcription and analysis.

Drawing upon my background and professional experience in media production, I made the decision to use the video editing software Adobe Premiere Pro CC to catalogue, playback, and transcribe each conversation. As illustrated in Figure 1, I created a sequence for each interview and used a tool within Premiere called “markers” to store transcripts

directly within a timeline of the audio files. During my initial exploration of this technique—while first reviewing the first two interviews I recorded—I made notes and comments within the markers I created to identify and label the topics being discussed. I did so with the intention of initially moving quickly through the interviews—in an effort to gain a comprehensive first impression of the data—with the plan of returning later to selectively transcribe sections of value. However, as I began the third conversation, I discovered that each conversation was too rich and filled with valuable quotes, and therefore decided to transition to fully transcribe the words of my participants, while only paraphrasing and selectively transcribing my comments. As discussed later in the data analysis section, the act of fully transcribing each interview forced me to slow down and more listen closely (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patti, 2015) for the codes and themes emerging from each conversation. When I later returned to transcribe the first interviews where I had only made preliminary notes—after transcribing the majority of the other interviews—I experienced a greater confidence in my understanding of how these stories and ideas fit within—and sometimes expanded—my codebook.

Throughout my transcription process, my workflow emerged as I was interacting with my data. I used different colored markers (red for me, turquoise for them, orange for quotations I deemed important while transcribing). Initially, I separated passages into paragraphs to delineate the progression of their ideas. Later, I created new paragraphs solely to signify that an exchange of dialogue was occurring. This way, I didn't feel the need to write names beside their corresponding dialogue, but rather could tell what was going on by

the paragraph breaks. I used this technique only during rapid exchanges of dialogue, otherwise I used colored markers to signify dialogue. I used quotations to identify when a person was speaking as if they were someone else. Sometimes this would be to signal the participant speaking as another person, and other times to signal them speaking as themselves within a memory. I used ellipse markers to indicate pauses in someone's speech, which assisted when reading back transcripts and making sense out of broken or incomplete sentences. I used brackets to signify if I was inferring meaning, or a word that was unclear. I also used brackets to signify when someone was laughing, or when they were acting something out [e.g. anything visual] that couldn't be extrapolated from audio.

I consciously omitted many words from interviews that I deemed irrelevant as a means of making transcripts more concise and legible. For instance, I omitted some stumbling over thoughts and “um”s as a means of attempting to keep true to the thought the participant was attempting to express, rather than the initial words they conjured while seeking to express ideas. Similarly, I sometimes omitted “false starts”—when a participant begins to say something in one way, but switches phrasing mid-thought.

After transcribing each interview, I exported the sequence markers as a text document, including organizing information such as the interview name, date, and time code which enabled me to quickly match transcripts to their corresponding audio files. Once completed, I printed each transcript document and reviewed them on paper. Not only did a paper copy offer a welcome relief from staring at a computer screen, it also allowed me to explore with my data within a different context, on a different medium—sometimes I even

went outside. While the act of closely listening to, and transcribing, each conversation I had with participants defined my introductory process of orienting myself to the data, the act of rereading the transcripts on paper presented a fresh context for reviewing data and compiling emerging themes.

Interview and document analysis methods. The processes of reviewing and transcribing interviews represented the initial phase of my data analysis. During listening and transcribing work sessions, I flagged salient quotes and wrote brief memos in a Word document with a table consisting of three columns: 1) Code/Theme; 2) Definition / Description of Theme; and 3) quote from participant.

Theme Code	Definition / Articulation	Quotes
First Impressions of teaching	Being awkward	<u>Duberman:</u>
	Not knowing what to do	Hansel:
	Exhausting your knowledge	<u>Toub:</u>
	Mimicking mentors	<u>Bathanti:</u> I exhausted every bit of my knowledge in the first 45 minutes.
	Treating undergrads like grad students, because that's where you were.	Goodman:
	What your teaching style produced.	Miller: When I first started teaching, I had such a ridiculously high set of expectations for myself and for students, that I probably treated an undergraduate class like it was a graduate course. I put so much work on them That's where you "were" too Yeah, I was so rigorous in preparation and was so determined about, "this is the content that I am supposed to make sure objectively they have." that I was, I won't say that I was overly rigid in the classroom, but I was very serious in the classroom. very committed to, "these are the things that you need to know to become a professional." But I wasn't leaving, perhaps, the open ended-ness that is necessary The creativity and the problem solving There was definitely problem solving, and I have always used projects as the principle vehicle. Always projects, but those

Figure 3: Codes and Quotes document. Example of initial coding process and document.

Initially, this document provided an effective way to begin analysis, and offered me a way to quickly move between audio sequences in Premiere and the Codes and Quotes document. As the volume of salient quotes increased, however, the document became bloated, unmanageable, and confusing to navigate, which forced me to revise my process and broaden my coding structure to reflect the expanding nature of my data.

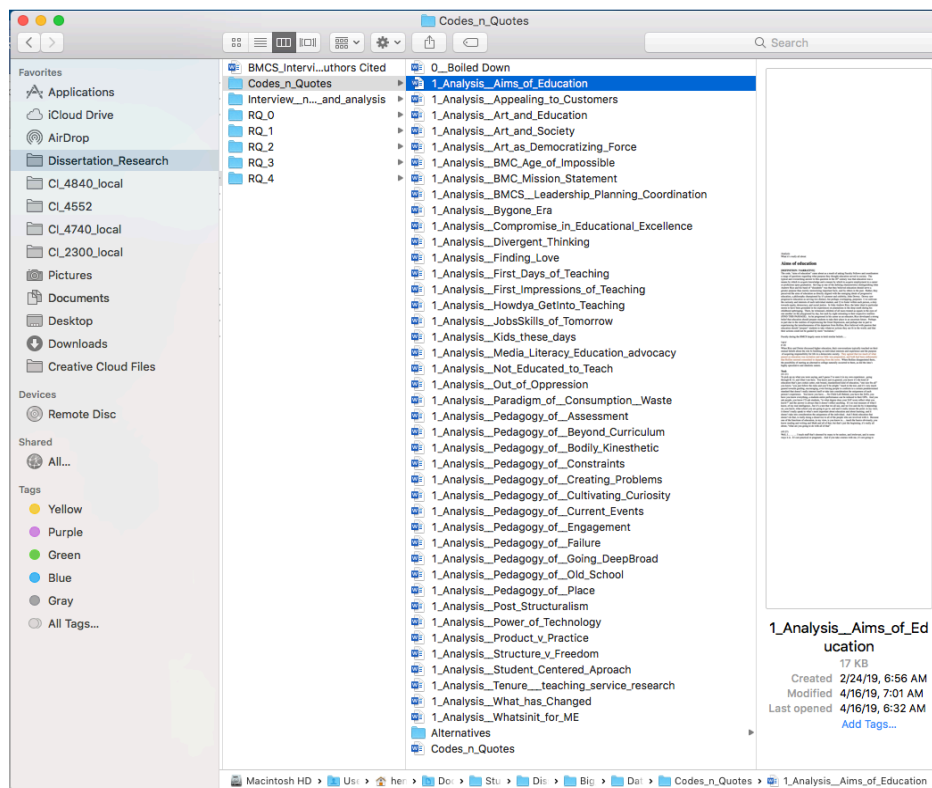


Figure 3: Codes and Quotes folder. This figure illustrates the codebook expanded to a folder containing a series of documents.

In her book *Becoming Qualitative Researcher*, Corrine Glesne (2011) recommends creating a codebook, where each code is given its own page, and themes are represented as the organization of sections of codes. Gleaning inspiration from Glesne, I decided to dedicate

an entire word document to each code, and use document file names and numerical hierarchies to organize codes within a folder on my computer. This technique enabled me to curate long quotations from my participants and passages from historical texts in a way that aligned with the affordances and constraints of working with (relatively) large qualitative data sets.

Whether working in my *Codes and Quotes* document, or in the broader *data analysis* folder on my computer, my analysis process remained consistent in that I identified, documented, and organized codes and themes as they emerged. As a means of paying attention to the overlapping nature of the codes being generated, I often duplicated participant quotes across several documents when they seemed to speak to more than one theme. For example, when participants described the ways in which they went about cultivating student centered learning experiences in their courses, I often organized their comments within both the “student centered” and “experiential learning” categories. I made this decision because their comments represented both the value of a student centered learning experience as well as the pedagogical strategies faculty utilized for designing their curriculum in this way. This process was intended to shed insight into places where codes could be clumped together into broader themes, or when seemingly unrelated codes share common ground.

Similarly, I analyzed historical texts—like the BMC mission statement—as living documents to be analyzed, deconstructed, and rediscovered. Through my analysis, I was able to filter and identify what I saw as the salient aspects of the spirit of the BMC, and hold these

aspects up in concert with the stories of the participants of the BMCS. In this way, the values of the BMC represented not the antiquated thinking of the 20th century, but rather a benchmark for any educator, at any time, who wishes to cultivate progressive practices.

Distilling Analysis

During the analysis process, I generated a list of 41 codes related to comments and ideas shared through conversations with Faculty Fellows of the BMCS, and review of historical documents related to the BMC. These codes revealed both the challenges and opportunities described by participants, and, although their comments spanned nearly a century, these collective stories and ideas reveal broad and connected notions related to both current realities and future potential in higher education.

I found the process of what I consider to be *traditional thematic analysis* frustrating and inadequate for the nature of the codes being explored. My frustration had to do with my preconception that my 41 codes ought to fit neatly into larger categories. Due to the amorphous nature of conversations related to the Spirit of Progressive Education in the 21st Century, I found it impossible to disentangle one code from the next. Although I was resistant to boiling down or “compil[ing]” (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018, p. 808)--codes into clear broader categories, I eventually did identify four broad and interconnected themes across which all forty one of my codes were threaded: Student Centered, Community Minded, Experience/Experiment, Context. Grounded in the scholarship of progressive education, these four themes not only encapsulate each of the underlying codes I discovered, they also travel across time, connecting the idealistic and short lived world of the BMC, to

the heavily-structured and bureaucratized world of contemporary midsized universities such as App State, and finally to both past and present ponderings about the future of higher education and cultivating the educated individual.

The following four themes emerged from my conversations with Faculty Fellows and coordinators of the BMCS and from my review of documents related to the history and legacy of BMC:

Student centered. Participants and historical documents alike underscored the importance of a student-centered approach to learning across all aspects of the educational process. This code emerged not only from faculty expressing their desire to enact learning experiences that meet the needs of each individual in their class, but also in how to motivate and inspire individuals to discover and connect with their interests and passions in the first place. Participants often spoke of their desire to engage and empower students as a point of entry, then to use this momentum to challenge them to refine their practice.

Community minded. Working in concert with the objective of a student-centered approach, participants emphasized the role class community plays in developing meaningful educational experiences. Participants described the ways that focusing on the interests of each individual in the classroom laid a foundation for discussing diversity and inclusion. They emphasized both the value they felt being community-minded added to their courses, as well as their strategies for designing classroom activities that cultivate community and build alliances. Findings reveal that developing collaboration and fellowship—between students, teachers, and even members of the greater community—was influential in participants’ decisions as to how to best setup and facilitate educational experiences.

Experiential learning. Based on an understanding that experiment and experience are essential elements in education, participants in this study described learning as a living process and suggested that a focus on experiential learning—or learning by doing—was necessary to cultivate problem solving in the classroom.

Context. The careers and experiences of both past and present participants in my study were marked by the social, political, economic, and environmental circumstances of their time. The theme “context” emerged for me as a means by which to capture the ways in which educational experiences are inevitably shaped by the local-to-global events that are playing out at the same time. Similar to the ways that the BMC’s founding took place amidst such significant world events as the Great Depression and World War II, the BMCS was also contextualized by the surrounding phenomena of our contemporary world.

Reflexivity

In contemporary qualitative research, scholars have abandoned the assumption that their own partiality or subjectivity can be extracted from the research process. Reflexivity refers to a researcher’s personal assessment of the influence of their perceptions, experiences, and systems of beliefs on the qualitative research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I carry no false pretenses about the partiality of my study, and in this section, I describe the varying ways in which I feel my subjectivity impacts as well as informs my research process.

I believe that my subjectivity plays an important role in understanding not only in the ways that I have conducted my interviews and data analysis, but also in the decision making processes that lead me to pursue this line of inquiry in the first place. Through my educational background in teacher preparation, as well as my experiences exploring social constructivist uses of educational media and technology, I have come to believe that classroom practices grounded in hands-on participatory and social learning, often deemed “progressive,” are more effective than educational experiences based in lecture, rote

memorization, and recall. Although I recognize that some courses in higher education are less suited to progressive and student-led tactics than others (e.g. large class sizes), I maintain a belief that even these educational contexts can be enhanced through practices that prioritize the experience of the individual and the experiences of the community (Dewey, 1938/1997). As such, I carry my belief in the value of progressive educational practices with me throughout my dissertation process. I understand that the types of questions I asked my participants during interviews are decidedly biased, in that they too hold my beliefs that participatory and community-based learning is generally preferred. Subsequently, as I combed through the data from this study, I was constantly reminded of my subjectivity as I sought to articulate the ways that Faculty Fellows perceived the importance of progressive educational values. I was not interested in ensuring that my participants ascribed to the same values as I did, but I was interested in learning how each person cultivated active, creative, and critical practices in the classroom. In this way, my research is not aimed at discovering whether or not progressive educational practices are beneficial, but rather the ways in which progressive education can best be enacted in the 21st Century.

Similarly, having earned my master's degree in Educational Media and Technology—and having taught in that field for the last eight years since earning my degree—I acknowledge that my perceptions of the impact of media and technology on society have shaped my perceptions of the contexts in which teaching and learning occur today.

Finally, my upbringing in Western North Carolina has instilled in me an affinity for the natural world, for fresh mountain air, and for the inspiration and stimulation education can receive from the environment. Therefore, I recognize that my excitement with BMC in many ways has to do with its connection to the very same mountain landscapes with which I identify. As Joseph Bathanti writes in the introduction to the special edition of the *Appalachian Journal* on the BMC, “it could have happened anywhere, but it didn’t” (p. 220)

I have carried these collective experiences and perceptions throughout each step of my dissertation process: from proposal, to data collection and analysis, to defense. My goal is to develop an understanding how we might awaken students today—and in the future—to an inner desire to be curious about the world around them. To be “fully awake” (Zommer & House, 2008) and present for their education.

Chapter 4

Research Findings: Four Interwoven Threads

To best represent my findings, I have crafted the following four chapters of vignettes, one for each of the four themes that emerged from the data analysis: (1) Student Centered, (2) Community-Minded, (3) Experiential Learning, and (4) Context. The data—which includes both conversations with Faculty Fellows of the BMCS and historical documents pertaining to education at the Black Mountain College (BMC)—revealed to me multiple facets of the spirit of progressive education in the 21st Century. Each interview resulted in meaningful conversations focused on the topics that seemed most salient to my participants and me in the moment. Similarly, with each document I analyzed related to the history and legacy of BMC, I sought out moments in which I felt the values of the College and its learning environment both shaped and reinforced my understanding of the spirit of progressive education. In sharing the findings of my study, I seek to illuminate similarities and differences between these two era of education, as well as attributes of their unique characteristics. In this way, each of the following vignettes represents a woven-together metanarrative of past and present stories about progressive education and educators in the Appalachian south.

Due to the interconnected nature of the themes, the quotes and findings in each vignette contains concepts that overlap and hold relevance for one or more of the other themes. For instance, I share stories in which educators position the needs and interests of

students at the center of their curriculum within Vignette 1 “Student Centered,” however their comments also inform my understanding of the ways educators design learning experiences that bring to life their student centered philosophy. Similarly, each of the first three vignettes are contextualized by the time and place in which they exist—past and present—therefore a number of key quotes and observations found within the first three vignettes hold significance for Vignette 4, which pertains to “Context.” In some places I illustrate the ways my data traverses across themes, and in other places I leave this notion unsaid. Nonetheless, connections across educational generations are prominent throughout my findings.

Vignette 1: Student Centered

During my interviews with Faculty Fellows and coordinators of the BMCS, I was struck by their collective desire to place students at the center of the curriculum. Going into this study, I had only limited knowledge of the history of the BMC, but I knew that its philosophy emphasized student centered learning. Upon initially reading about the educational philosophy that drove BMC (Rice, 1933), I began to understand that this College did more than merely emphasize a student centered approach to education, it lived—and died—by this principle. Therefore, through this chapter’s assemblage of past and present stories, I discuss moments where participants position a student centered approach as more than merely a valuable tool, or good idea, but rather as the necessary core that drives all their decisions and actions.

Each Student is a Class

During my interview with Jason Miller, we were discussing the course he designed for the BMCS and the outcries of gratitude and encouragement he received from his students afterwards. He stated that many students had reached out to him via email after the fact and told him how much the course philosophy had meant to them. As a result of their positive feedback, he created an activity for future classes where, at the opening of the semester, students create “their declaration of operation for this studio course.” He shared a story with me about how he and his students worked together to design a contract for their conduct and work together during the BMCS. He told me that this process helped to change the power dynamic between student and teacher, and between student and curriculum:

[The contract] levels the playing field, which I think for this generation of students, which interestingly from 2010 to now is a completely different student. By creating that, and putting more responsibility on them, they give you more back. (JM)

Jason Miller’s remarks about the “completely different students” of today caught my attention. As we continued our conversation, I asked him to elaborate on the characteristics of students today, and what distinguishes them from their predecessors. He responded by describing how his program and department have grown and how that growth has led to the enrollment of a more diverse population of students. He stated that today’s learners aren’t afraid to tell you what is and is not helping them learn within a given course. As a means of explaining the ways these elements have impacted his job as an educator, Jason Miller described what I noted to be a summation of his student centered philosophy of education:

Each student, no matter the class, I have to think of that one student as also one class, I have to figure out how to reach that student. And I have the luxury of doing that because I usually have classes with 20 students or less. I'm not in a lecture hall with 100 students who you know if you knew all 100 students at the end of the semester, the students would be amazed. I make it a point to try to know them. Not just by their name, but by their interest. And try to teach to that interest, which creates at least the breadth of perspective. That, if I can create that open environment, then they can see that their voice is valid. In that room or in that space. (JM)

Jason Miller's comments speak to the core of the issue of a student-centered system of education. By prioritizing the needs of the individual, educators are, by virtue, downplaying the role of the rote memorization and the recall of information, which historically has been a common educational objective (Garte, 2017; Kloss, 2018).

Jason Miller also noted the varying nature of educational practices across the curriculum in higher education, and the ways that his philosophy of education would not be suitable to all learning contexts and class sizes. He went on to describe the ways in which a student's background and prior educational experiences serve to inform his understanding of how to best work with each student:

And that's what I try to think of here. Because I've learned that I have to try and learn, from where these students come from. If it's the community college system, if it's, you know, the public school system. We don't get a lot of private school kids. So we have to understand the system that gets them here. (JM)

Jason Miller's comments suggest that he is able to better serve his students when he knows their backgrounds and the experiences that have helped them arrive where they are today. He also shared how his student centered philosophy of education informs his approach to assessment:

But the goal is to say, “each of you as far as I’m concerned, is one class. You all have the same assignments, and you have the same expectations and you have the same grading rubric. But if a student demonstrates no knowledge at the start and a huge increase by the end. That student has just as well a chance with bad grades here, good grades here, to get the same grade as somebody who might just plug along, but coast, because they can. Because they know the material. Because it doesn’t reflect... It’s not just translating information to a test. (JM)

Jason Miller’s comments suggest that student achievement in his courses is measured as much by growth as it is by proficiency. By better understanding the skillsets and knowledge bases from which each student begins, he is able to better appreciate their level of growth and performance.

Similarly, Damiana Pyles also espoused a student centered philosophy of education. She expressed her desire to create an environment where students were encouraged to think for themselves alongside of scholarly readings and course materials. During our conversation, she explained how some students express a desire to have assignments work like “a checkbox” where the teacher provides all the necessary parameters and materials for a given assignment. In describing the students she worked with, she stated:

[Damiana] They were very motivated students. So I never had any issues getting them to do the work, but they wanted it to be a checkbox. And they didn’t want to do that kind of deep thinking that they were capable of doing, because they were already good students. They wanted to really check through the boxes.

[John] So They wanted structure?

[Damiana] They wanted structure, but they wanted me to be accountable for that structure and [to] give them all the information that they would need in order to succeed.

[John] Did that match your vision for the classroom at the time? Were you prepared to give them that?

[Damiana] No! I think they should do their own thinking, and I still do that. I think I provide a space for them, I facilitate a space for them to do their own work, to do their own thinking, to do that kind of deep thinking to engage with the material. (DP)

In this passage, Damiana shared her thoughts on student autonomy and the role the learner plays in their education. Her comments suggested to me that students have tendencies to get stuck in patterns of trying to give the teacher what they want, without also thinking for themselves and forming their own beliefs. Her remarks also suggest a belief that students may not always be prepared to do their own thinking as a result of their prior experiences in formal education. I noted how her ideas and beliefs about education were aligned with the values of BMC, in that both viewed education as an opportunity for learners to cultivate original thinking in concert with course material.

As I was reading about the history of BMC, hearing endorsements of student centered learning—like those expressed by Jason and Damiana—prompted me to take note of the brand of student centered learning that was taking place at BMC. At the time, my exploration of the history related primarily to the origins of the College and biographical information about key individuals related to its founding. I discovered that founder John Andrew Rice believed that learning should be self-directed and conceived the BMC as a place where autonomy could thrive (Reynolds, 1998; Rice, 1933). To this end, students were given full authority to define and choreograph their courses and schedules, even if that involved doing nothing at all.

Lying in the Sun

While exploring the BMC digital archives (Black Mountain College: Innovation in Art, Education, and Lifestyle, n.d.) I came across a document written by John Andrew Rice (1933) titled *Organizing and Procedures*, which outlined some of the purposes and practices of the college:

I have said before that the student is the curriculum. This means of course that there are no required courses. It does not, however, mean that there is no required knowledge; but how the student acquires his knowledge is his own affair, whether it be in classroom, laboratory, library, or lying in the sun. (p. 3)

Referenced throughout my findings are several documents which illuminate the radical academic freedom offered at BMC, however I feel this document establishes the College's mission succinctly. Rice's staunch defense of a student centered philosophy speaks directly to the heart of the College's approach to progressive education. As I explored the history of the founding of BMC, I learned that Rice believed students should be the ones to control the parameters of their education. He believed that they should be allowed to set their own schedules, but he also insisted that a student's life should exist with a balance between work and play, and I believe Rice would add *playful work*.

Rice had a propensity for callous remarks that earned him a reputation as a brilliant but brash educator, relentless in his convictions (Duberman, 1972/2009; Reynolds, 1998). In reading about the ways that BMC foregrounded student freedom and independence, I came to perceive Rice as an affirming figure who believed that learning is best achieved when

students are nourished with autonomy and inspiration, rather than coerced by authority and external rewards.

Not Freedom *From*, By Freedom *For*

Students at BMC were said to quickly adopt an attitude of “intellectual enthusiasm” (Reynolds, 1998, p.130). While exploring the special—quadruple-issue—edition of the Appalachian Journal dedicated to Black Mountain College (2017), I came across an article by Mary Emma Harris (2017) titled “The Wisdom of Josef Albers,” in which she curated several passages Albers wrote during his career. Although English was not his native tongue, he frequently gave lectures at galleries and other institutions and published writings on his educational philosophy. As a result, Albers crafted a series of documents, which Harris (2017) describes as “relevant and enlightening” (p. 460). These passages describe his views on education and the nature of student freedom as it relates to learning. In the following passage from Harris’s article, Albers clarifies that freedom as experienced at BMC was not a freedom *from* responsibility, but a freedom *for* the pursuit of your own purpose:

[Education for Democracy] should be a matter of course today that each of us has the obligation not only to protect and defend our democratic freedom against aggression from inside and attack from outside, but to give our people an understanding of what democratic living means and is worth to them, and to build up a conviction that spiritual development under a democratic constitution is on a higher human level and therefore higher cultural level than those opposing ideologies, that we must remain on the higher level if human progress is to continue.

...how to achieve this understanding and conviction? Through a democratic education in which the qualities of character are just as much considered as intellectual abilities, in which the development of critical thought, of creative and intellectual abilities and social adjustment are more respected than mere acquisition of knowledge and skill;

where being cultured is more highly estimated than being learned. That is, where humanity is the aim instead of efficiency.

...to be only proud of freedom would be proof of no true understanding of freedom. Freedom, if understood as being free from something has no positive sense at all. Only being free for something has active and productive meaning, is worth consideration. It is urgent now that we understand freedom and work for its protector: democracy.
(p. 465)

In my view, Albers' comments reflect a belief that the freedom offered at BMC required a student's dedication, imagination, and curiosity. I feel Albers was saying that freedom was neither an escape from duty, nor an excuse to do nothing. Freedom was an invitation to allow one's heart and mind to guide the direction of their scholarship and actions (Campbell & Moyers, 1988/1991).

Joseph Albers Strived to Shape Human Beings at BMC

Before accepting a teaching position at BMC, Joseph Albers was a leading teacher and influential designer at the Bauhaus in Germany. There, he developed not only a keen understanding of color and design theory, but he also refined his craft as an educator, teaching students to produce innovative products that contribute to society. In the following passage, Katherine Reynolds (1998) noted the ways Albers described distinctions between the aims of education at the Bauhaus and at BMC:

At the Bauhaus, Albers had been primarily concerned with producing professional artists who in turn would revolutionize (that is, redesign) society. "I think we never used the word education once," Albers told me; "we spoke about influencing the industry." At Black Mountain, the focus was less on shaping civic forms than individual human beings, and the shift of emphasis modified Albers' own approach accordingly. He came to feel at Black Mountain, "much more personally obliged for the creatures under my hands" than he had at the Bauhaus, and he insists that his

specific classroom techniques (as well as his general ideas about education) underwent considerable development” (p. 48).

This passage demonstrates the unique and purposeful ways in which students and their creative processes were central components of education at BMC. Unlike his work at the Bauhaus, where the mission was to produce innovation and innovators, the BMC was most concerned with producing moral citizens, capable of using art, creativity, and compassion to face the challenges and solve the problems of an unknown future.

Like Freedom, You Grow into it

Several historians mention that students—particularly in the first years of the College’s existence—expressed feeling uncomfortable with such a level of independence, however many of them later thrived within this setting and found that the freedom resulted in heightened productivity (Dawson, 1991; Duberman, 1972/2009; Reynolds, 1998). In reading Joseph Bathanti’s (2017) opening article in the *Appalachian Journal*, “Magnetic Ether: ‘The Back of Beyond,’” I was struck by a quote that he cited by former BMC student and poet Fielding Dawson (1991), who described his life as a student at BMC and the subsequent energy he received from his education amidst independence:

Black Mountain was freedom.

And within that freedom I and others developed a discipline in drawing and writing that involved listening and seeing with such continuous intensity it became my way of life. As much an influence on me today, and every day, as it ever was. Black Mountain was not something you grew out of. Like freedom, you grew into it (p. 7).

In reading Fielding Dawson’s words, I got the impression that the self-directed nature of the learning taking place at BMC instilled in him a habit of curiosity that he carried throughout

his career. I noted a similar sentiment from John Andrew Rice's (n.d.) "Organizing and Procedures" document, where he wrote, "curiously, when no courses are required, too many courses are taken" (p. 1). His comments reflect the idea that students who are left to their own devices, but are in the presence of inspiration, will find an inner motivation to push themselves to do more than any educator could or would ask of them. These historical accounts paint a picture of what the BMC's philosophy of student centered learning looked like. Several of the documents I reviewed related to the type of student who might be the best fit to this non-traditional learning environment.

Similarly, Joseph Bathanti also described how students can feel pulled between wanting to *grow into* their passions and their desire to pursue a stable career. He stressed: "You have to make a living, I mean you really do have to make a living." In my reply, I attempted to play devil's advocate by paraphrasing Sir Ken Robinson (2010) and pointing out the changing relationship between education and the workforce:

[John] I also teach, through the College of Ed., in teacher preparation classes. And we speak about the fact that education exists in a bygone era of the 20th Century: where there's bells and there's the factory model, there is the idea that if you show up on time and do what's asked of you, that you'll have a job on the other end. And we don't live in that world necessarily.

[Joseph] We really don't.

[John] We live in a world, where people need to think way outside the box, they need to re-invent the wheel, they need to be problem solvers. With [this] in mind, what would you say is the ideal spirit of your classroom? What do you try to cultivate?

[Joseph] You know, let me talk about my Black Mountain class for a little bit. . . One thing that I tried to do, to be kind of mimetic of the Black Mountain experience, and what I assumed went on in the classroom—and I was really close friends in the last

ten years of his life with Fielding Dawson, who was one of the Black Mountain writers. We ended up doing a lot of prison work together—Anyhow, one of things that I try to do in all of my Black Mountain classes was to make the students responsible for their own learning—to really turn the class over to them. And I would always say, ‘I don’t care what you do, just so you work really hard at it and are crazy passionate. I will approve whatever you decide to do in here. But those are the two things, you have to have a decided work ethic, you have to work like a fiend, and it has to be something you care about just passionately. (JB)

His comments point to a focus not only on cultivating a learner’s intrinsic motivation and autonomy, but also in helping learners develop skillsets for expressing and representing their ideas in ways that matter beyond the classroom. He described “care” as an ingredient in education capable of pushing students to work tirelessly to achieve the goals they set out to accomplish, and how under these circumstances his role in the classroom becomes that of supporting and believing in them. Joseph Bathanti went on to explain why, for that reason, he felt his plan was never really successful:

To the students—especially in the Black Mountain class—it never really happened. Now I could blame that on the students, which is not fare. Probably I was not willing to seed that kind of control when all was said and done. Because of some of the things that we talked about. Teachers are neurotic about how much knowledge they have filled their students heads with that day. “Did he, she, they leave the classroom enhanced today? How did I do?” (JB)

Joseph Bathanti’s deeply reflexive and vulnerable comments reflect the care and drive that he and many other educators put into the craft of teaching. His comments about not being able to fully “turn the class over” to his students reflects a component of the tension that exists in the relationship between structure and freedom in education (Garte, 2017; Mossman, 2018). Although he wanted to give his students control and freedom over the direction of the course, he also wanted to ensure that the class had a legitimate purpose and direction. As a result, he

described the experience as somewhat of a failure in that regard. He went on to tell me the story of first pitching the student-centered approach to his BMCS class:

It was a spring class so it would have been over Christmas break. On a legal pad next to my bed I wrote, and I still have it—this is an historic document for me—it says, ‘Turn the Black Mountain class over to the students.’ And I circled it real big. And when I went in on the very first day—I taught this class in January of 2018—I told them all that story, and I told them that was my aspiration: That I wanted to turn the class over to you, but I didn’t even know what that meant. I had no idea what that meant. I try to be really candid with my students. I try to tell them, “when I know something I will tell you but there are a lot of things I don’t know.” I am a member of the class. I ask a lot of questions. That doesn’t mean I always know the answers to them, this is a quest. (JB)

Turning a class over to students requires a fundamental shift in authority, where the learner possesses equal if not greater control over the direction of the course than the teacher. I noted in Joseph Bathanti’s comments a tension between his desire to structure his courses in a meaningful and practical way, and his desire, inspired in part by the radical philosophy of BMC, to give students as much freedom as possible. Importantly, as I illustrate in the following pages, many factors related to increased amounts of structure distinguished the educational practices that were occurring at BMC from those occurring at Appalachian State University.

Community Partnerships

Billy Schumann spoke about the ways he works to foster student centered learning through community-based projects. He described how the Center for Appalachian Studies helps students find internship opportunities that align their interests with the needs of a local

organizations, resulting in relationships that ideally benefit both the student and the surrounding community:

We are doing stuff like this, all over the place. So, that idea of freedom, there's still structure there, but we give the students latitude to take opportunities, so we don't take independent studies lightly, nor do we take it as sort of a way to get a reading list done... And so if [we] can create realistic and challenging learning goals out of extending a student's engagement with a non-profit—which we've done... We see that as valuable learning, just like something you could do in class. And so we're willing to substitute, in some cases, that type of experience for other things... So the Center, in its structure, has a lot of flexibility. And because it's built upon coursework across disciplines, there's a lot of reasons why... that idea of interdisciplinary collaboration moves through that. And again, this is why I got interested in BMC. (BS)

Billy's comments point to how the Center for Appalachian Studies is able to create learning experiences for students with a great amount of freedom, while operating within a highly structured educational environment.

These opening quotes highlight the student centered nature of learning across areas of studies and across nearly one hundred years. They illustrate to me how past and present educators have worked to position students as leaders in their classrooms. As discussed in Chapter 2, education at BMC resisted structure in every way they could, however the Faculty Fellows of the BMCS—teaching at Appalachian State University in 2018—operated within a much more structured system. These patterns continue in the following pages, as I discuss the ways that the BMCS fellows were able to balance their desire to give students as much academic freedom as possible, while also operating within a highly structured educational system.

Is This What You Want?

Jason Miller and I discussed how students today seem to be conditioned to defer to authority and therefore to resist opportunities for academic freedom. During our conversation, he shared with me the growth he has experienced as an educator, shifting from steering students towards his own preconceived ideas of correct-ness, towards inviting them to explore and develop their own thinking:

And you recognize it when a student asks the question, which always happens: “Well, what do you want us to do?” And my response now is different than when I started teaching. When I started teaching I would say, “well I think you should do this,” now I’m saying “I want you to tell me what you think you should do, and produce that.” and then let’s talk about that. Versus me saying, “do it this way” and then you get your product. “Show me what you think, then we can talk about how to move it toward product.” (JM)

Jason’s comments reflect a shift that he experienced in his teaching philosophy towards a student centered approach to education. Rather than serving as an authority, he explained to me that he now strived to help students move their own ideas forward. During our conversation I gained an appreciation for his desire to prepare students to face the inevitable problems they will encounter in the future.

As Faculty Fellows and coordinators of the BMCS shared more and more stories related to student centered learning, I searched for additional connections between the stories they were sharing and literature on the history of the BMC. In my exploration, I noted a story shared across two biographies (Duberman, 1972/2009, Reynolds, 1998) about a meeting between John Andrew Rice and a new student that occurred on the grand front porch of the campus’s Robert E. Lee Hall. Rice inquired as to what the student was interested in

studying. The student was “at a loss” (Duberman, 1972/2009, p. 36) as to what his own interests were, having never been encouraged to consider them previously in relationship to his education. Duberman wrote that this particular student—interested in learning about the root causes of the Great Depression—went on to study courses across economics, history, and philosophy at BMC. In this way, I view a student-centered approach as a unifying element connecting these past and present eras of education, regardless of how different their structures and contexts might be.

Cookie Cutter Education

Several participants expressed concern that an overly-structured system of education diminishes creativity and personal expression. During my conversation with James Toub, we discussed some of the challenges that emerge in education as a result of the underlying tension between academic structure and freedom. I told him that my fear was that an overly technology-centric approach might inhibit teaching and learning. He told me he agreed and described how an overly structured system of education leads to conformity rather than individuality:

[John] Through studying Educational Media and Technology at Boston University, I found myself perhaps instantly enamored with the potential of [using tools for] innovation.” I commented. “But [I am] also extremely skeptical and reluctant to be technocentric.” I said. “Because I feel, like so many things, it divides us more than unites us.

[James] I’ve seen it in my own experience going through K-12, and what I see here just in general, it’s the kind of education that’s cookie cutter, rule bound, standardized kind of education, one-size-fits-all... you just follow the rules and you’ll be alright. Teach to the test. And it’s very much geared towards guiding, encouraging, even forcing people to conform to a certain predetermined standard that doesn’t really

interest itself [with], or take into consideration, the uniqueness of each person's experience. (JT)

His advocacy for the “uniqueness of each person's experience” stood out to me. Aligned with the educational philosophy of the BMC, James' comments suggest that when education prioritizes the transmission of knowledge deemed important by the teacher, school, or educational system, student interests become irrelevant to the task at hand. His beliefs align with the educational philosophy of BMC, and of BMCS Faculty Fellows and coordinators.

The Language of Multiple Solutions

In a comment related to assessment, Jason Miller described how his approach to teaching has evolved, thereby expanding his notion of the “best solution” to a given problem:

I'm less interested now in things that might be the best solution, because the best solution in my head may not necessarily be the best solution. The language of multiple solutions is what comes out of a studio now, and it reflects an authorial voice of one student, or a group of students, working together to solve a problem. And giving that agency to students has been a big key and part of why I liked participating in the Black Mountain College Semester. (JM)

Jason speaks of a student's “authorial voice” as a driver of his curricular and pedagogical decisions today. His comments are aligned with the educational values and philosophy of creativity and divergent thinking that I found when reading about BMC. He told me that to think of multiple solutions to a given problem is to honor the perhaps-not-fully-formed ideas of our students, and to understand that a student's ideas will develop over time, or may even represent a line of thinking that shifts paradigms and transforms thinking in a given area in the years to come.

Building upon the importance of applying—rather than just memorizing—information and knowledge, James Toub explained to me that he feels that standardized tests like the SAT are not valuable indicators of intelligence, and do not speak to his understanding of the spirit of education. Expanding on his previous statement that a “cookie cutter” education does not account for individuality, he shared with me his broader aim of education built upon the idea of empowering students to become agents of change in the world:

I’ll ask students, “To what degree does your SAT score reflect what you know?” and the answer is always that “It doesn’t reflect anything. It’s no real measure of what I know, [or] of my *real* intelligence.” But, it’s a test that we all use, and we live and die by it depending on, you know, what school you are going to go to. And it really misses the point in my view. It doesn’t really speak to what’s most important about education and about learning. It doesn’t take into consideration the uniqueness of the individual. And I think education that doesn’t do that, is really doing a disservice to all of the people who are involved with it. Because one of the functions of education, in my view, is... to teach the basics obviously, you know reading and writing and all of that, but that’s just the beginning, it’s really all about, “What are you going to do with all of that? In what way is that useful to you?” (JT)

In his comments, I noted that James was most concerned with designing educational experiences that complement a learner’s personal interests and experiences. In this way, knowledge is not something to be possessed, but rather something to be created through acts of self-expression. He went on to describe the dangers of education based in excessive structure and conformity:

You know, if everyone is expected to do the same thing all the time, you are really going to lose a lot of people. . . it doesn’t really encourage people to think on their own and to come up with their own solutions to problems, because all you are doing is trying to solve the problems that have been determined for you by some other authority. In my view that doesn’t really serve anybody well, and I think leads to

mediocrity really. And this university has its own problems that way, but this university is no different than anybody else. The system itself is designed in many ways. . . to encourage conformity, rather than innovation and free thinking, I think. (JT)

James' emphasis on celebrating individuality—and thereby divergent approaches to problem solving—is a theme that ran throughout my conversations with Faculty Fellows and coordinators of the BMCS, and was also present in literature I reviewed on the philosophy of education found at BMC.

Splendid Mediocrity

During my analysis of historical documents related to BMC, I learned that James Toub's concern of avoiding the manufacturing of "mediocrity" is a sentiment wholeheartedly, and literally, shared by BMC founder John Andrew Rice. In fact, I found a quote by Rice in Reynold's (1998) biography, where he used this same word to describe the dangers of celebrating the average:

We have, in our eagerness to preserve the good, sometimes forgotten that we also have a duty elsewhere, to the best. Not that one begrudges the mediocre man his chance; only, let his mediocrity be not quite so splendid. If we must sing the average, let us not call it divine" (p. 50).

John Andrew Rice's comments were part of a larger narrative in Reynold's biography, in which she discusses his advocacy for honors schools as places where the most talented students could go to cultivate ideas and be in community with one another. I view his unapologetic comments as a reflection of a broader concern about the manufacturing and commodification of education, where a degree becomes little more than a transactional process requiring students to pay money and show up.

Education their Grandparents Understand

In my conversation with Ray Miller, he stressed that education is a lifelong process, and although he wants to prepare students for success immediately after graduating, he also wants them to build on that success for years to come afterwards. He shared a story with me that emphasized his belief that educators need to prepare students to meet the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century from a place of their own identity, informed by their own experiences, even long after graduation:

The guy that used to be the UNC President—Hall I think was his last name—came here to speak with the faculty senate a couple of years ago before he left. And he said, “the truth is, [we] are also educating [students] for their last job. So” he says, “ I didn’t start off wanting to be the president for one of the most important systems of higher education. That’s not what I thought when I was 23, but,” he says, “one of the things that got me [to this position], was because of the liberal arts background I have. That taught me how to pay attention and negotiate my way through possibilities. (RM)

Ray used this story as a way to relay his view of the overall aims of education. He feels that, whether they are aware of it or not, his purpose as an educator is to prepare students to think for themselves so that they can meet the challenges and opportunities of an unknown future. He continued by describing the qualities that a student centered education imparts upon learners. A message which he says is perhaps understood even more fully by the elders of our family:

You want to make sure that [students] are also educating themselves. In terms of the confidence they need, for the jobs and things we don’t even know exist yet. And that’s going to come from internally educating them about their sense of character. Their sense of what matters, their sense of empathy with people who are very diverse themselves. These are the things that are going to move them through, beyond the job

and into a life that is going to be able to sustain themselves over a lifetime [where] we have no idea what is going to happen. That, grandparents understand. (RM)

In his comments, I noted the ways that higher education served a greater purpose than merely training individuals for a given profession. Ray's approach to education seemed to revolve around the cultivation of more holistic skillsets, such as "empathy" and problem solving. I often think of the iconic words of Yeats (1961/1980), who described education not as "the filling of a pail, but the planting of a seed." Ray's words speak of education not as an entity possessed by the teacher that is then handed out judiciously to students. Instead, Ray stated that students should leave his courses not only with a series of technical skillsets that they can apply in the near future, but also with knowledge and values that can be applied to new contexts and used as a foundation for further learning.

In continuing our discussion on his student centered approach to education, I asked Ray to describe the greatest challenge he faces as an educator today. His reply revealed his desire to form meaningful connections with students each semester, and to recognize just how different students are now from the time when he first began teaching:

Woah, the biggest challenge huh. . . I suppose the biggest challenge I face as an educator every year is, "who really are the students that you are teaching?" Because the ones you are teaching this year—even the ones that I am teaching this semester—are not the ones from last semester. Okay! So you really have to take the time to figure out "who's there," inside that room with you? (RM)

His reply to my question underscored his student-centered approach to teaching, where connections between individuals matter as much, if not more, than course content. He

believes that in taking time to get to know each individual student, educators can build even more meaningful and productive teaching practices.

Ray and I also discussed our mutual affinity for the scholarship of Joseph Campbell, and his work popularizing concepts like, “following your bliss” (Campbell & Moyers, 1988/1991) and “The Hero With a Thousand Faces” (Campbell, 1988/1991). In the following passage, he shared with me how learning to see the world through dance compelled him to want to help his students find their metaphor, or approach to life:

You know, Joseph Campbell says in one of his lectures... “the sooner you find out what the word is that is the metaphor for you, you will know the journey you need to go on.” And for me, that notion was “dance.” So, words dance on a page for me. Sounds dance in terms of how they construct musicality for me. How we interact with each other and shape our environment as we are having this conversation is a dance that we are creating together. But for somebody else it might be another word. But whatever that word is, as soon as you hit that word, you go, “that’s me! That’s how I connect naturally with the world around me.” (RM)

Ray’s comments reveal his belief that each student must meet the challenges and opportunities of the 21st Century from a place of their own identity, informed by their own experiences. In an effort to prepare students to be successful—not just immediately after graduation, but throughout their careers—Ray strives to instill confidence, character, and persistence in students.

The Stories that *Destroyed* their Lives also *Resuscitated* their Lives

While the Faculty Fellows and coordinators of the BMCS all discussed the ways in which they made their classes valuable for students long after they leave the classroom, Joseph Bathanti shared how he has developed progressive and experiential educational

practices in his work with adult populations. When I asked him about the role storytelling plays in education, he described the experience of working with veterans of the Vietnam War and assisting them in using narrative and poetry as an expressive and therapeutic practice:

[John] I'm curious to see, between the Black Mountain College [itself] and the Semester, what do you see as the relationship between either art or storytelling, and education?

[Joseph] I guess for me at this point John, there is nothing but story, in so many ways. Connecting people to their personal narrative and connecting people to the very fact that they have a story, I think, connects them to place. Connects them to their soul. It gives them, you know, it stakes them to a particular place and a particular time. (JB)

He explained that storytelling allowed students to not only speak from a place of personal experience, but to first realize that they have a wealth of experiences from upon which to extrapolate their own ideas related to scholarly topics. He went on to share a story about working with veterans of war as a means by which to explore and express emotions and prior experiences:

[Joseph] The best example I can give about what story means to me is that for the past six or seven years, I've been working with Vietnam combat vets with PTSD. So these are guys that are like seventy, seventy two years old. And for over fifty years they've kept bottled inside them all these horrific memories that have really destroyed their lives. So the paradox is. . . and I can't take any credit for this, I just give them permission to tell their stories—you know, I was the Writer in Residence at the Asheville VA Hospital for 6 months—so I walk in. . . and I tell them they are going start writing poems... I'm oversimplifying things, but here I am, I've got a tie and coat on and here are all these crusty Vietnam vets in all their Vietnam regalia. Hardened combat vets, all from mountain counties surrounding Asheville.

[John] And where was this meeting?

[Joseph] It was in Classroom B of the Asheville VA. . . At first it was pretty daunting. So these guys, little by little—eighteen of them—they didn't know one another before they walked in the room, but they were all Vietnam combat vets so they had an

instant bond there. They began to tell their stories, for whatever reason, and I think one reason was because. . . there were so many of them and when one guy told a story, another guy had a story, and another one had a story and another one. (JB)

Joseph noted that the community of veterans embraced one another's experiences as inherently connected with their own, an act which subsequently prompted them to let go of their inhibitions as they shared stories of deeply personal and traumatic experiences. He went on to describe what he perceived to be the value of such an educational experience for these veterans:

[Joseph] The great paradox is that the stories that destroyed their lives also resuscitated their lives. When they were inside, they were destroying them, and when they came out, they weren't nearly as threatening. They were these glowing extraordinary accounts of the fact that they had been human beings, on the planet, for that year, during Vietnam, and that that year had defined their whole lives in horribly negative ways, but now that year is beginning to define their lives because the stories are outside, in an orderly fashion, instead of inside in a hideous chaos. Now they are beginning to define their lives in really glowing ways. Now, I don't know what happened, I didn't do anything. I never want to take credit for anything." He said.

[John] Haha. Says you.

[Joseph] No, no, but I do mean that. I do mean that, because I don't want it to be self-serving. I just stood by in kind of awe. I'd never seen people's lives transformed the way these men, and at such an advanced age. And a lot of these guys too were undereducated, I won't say uneducated—they were working class.

[John] I mean, it speaks to the population that goes to war.

[Joseph] Yeah. Yeah, I mean we have a few Jackson County boys that come from there.

[John] Certainly.

[Joseph] They were rural people who got out of high school and went to work. They had never written poetry, they had never read poetry. You know, poetry. Jesus! (JB)

Joseph's comments about Jackson County were a reference to an earlier part of our conversation where I shared that I grew up in that part of North Carolina. He shared with me his views not only about the stereotyping and stigmatization that get directed towards poetry and the arts, but also how education faces as a whole faces similar prejudice . He explained that once these veterans let go of their inhibitions and started telling their stories through poetry and prose, they seemed to undergo an observable transformation:

[Joseph] Because of whatever was in them that came out, their stories.... they had these epiphanies, they had these illuminations. So, their relationships with their wives and their kids became better. Their mental health became better, a lot of them got rid of meds they were taking.

[John] Wow.

[Joseph] And they became kind of writers... and you know, these guys aren't writers, but man can they write. And... it's just been kind of amazing. I've never seen anything [like it] in forty two years. I mean I've never seen that kind of transformation. Especially seventy year old's... lost causes you know, lost causes. But they weren't. And still, I mean it's not like they are cured, but they have a new lease on life, and it came because a kind of new lease on life united them. And their stories of who they were, what they had done, and what they had become. (JB)

Joseph's story speaks of how processes of narrative and poetic writing can assist people of all ages—even those with traumatic or otherwise suppressed memories—with being able to reclaim portions of their lost identity. As we continued talking, he went on to further explain his views on the ways that creative and narrative writing—with a focus on process, not product—can assist people in taming memories that have otherwise taken on lives of their own:

I'm fascinated with memory more than anything. The memories, these memories are fifty, fifty-five years old, and they've metastasized and grown other memories and

gone crazy on them. And they don't remember, they have no earthly idea what really happened, you know, they just have a version of the truth. And that's what they've tried. . . that's what's haunted them. They know what they remember and that's a different thing than what happened. And whether or not it actually happened is irrelevant. You know, cause it doesn't decrease the fact that they've been haunted and destroyed by it. (JB)

As I listened to Joseph Bathanti's comments, I noted how creative writing enabled these individuals to represent their ideas outside of their own psyche, and that by doing so they are able to work abstractly and impartially with their own experiences.

He also acknowledged that memories can be dangerous, especially when working with veterans of war. He told me that while he encouraged veterans to confront their past experiences and memories through creative representation, he also cautioned them to be careful and to work within their personal comfort zones:

And a lot of them said "man I had forgotten," you know, and that happened a lot, [which] I felt was beautiful. "Yeah man, I hadn't thought of that." You know, and they cried and they laughed... [but] I always say establish your own thresholds, "don't go places that you don't feel like going. There's plenty of places to go. Without going into the furnace right now. Maybe later." And I tell my young students that too. "You don't have to torture yourself man. You've got your whole life to write about hard things." Take it at your pace. And man oh man, yeah. Cause they all had survivor's guilt. They all had [it]. They all felt like they should have died. They all felt like, they let people down, and people died because they didn't do this or that. All stuff they had no control over. (JB)

In reviewing this comment, I noted the way that Joseph Bathanti was able to connect issues of trauma with the narrative and creative writing work he does with traditional-age college students. To me, his comments reinforced the importance of story in a student-centered approach to education with traditional-age college students as well.

College Students Need Resuscitation Too

As we concluded the portion of our conversation about the role of storytelling in education, he shared his views about the stigmatization of creative writing and poetry in society:

[Joseph] And that's what happens in a classroom. I think when people share stories and it's kind of a safe place. It takes a while... I think of story in terms of those guys just cause I had never seen anything like it in my life, because they were lost causes. And the other thing is they would just assume write a poem as like wear lipstick or something... You know they were kind of like men's men from the old days man. You know, John Wayne-ish types.

[John] Poetry has a stereotype.

[Joseph] Absolutely, man, "feelings, man, I don't want to talk about this crap. I aint got." You know one of the things they said was "I aint got no feelings." And even my Black Mountain Kids. They had some things nagging them, that they needed to get out. Whether those were sort of forays into drugs, or suicidal ideation, self-mutilation, weird relationships they were in, sexuality. Religious kind of loggerheads, their lifestyle with their repressive religion. And sometimes just the ways that they felt let down by education over the years. (JB)

This conversation crystalized in me the notion that a student centered approach is vital to cultivating meaningful educational experiences. By positioning learners to work with their own interests, experiences, and skillsets, educators have the opportunity to shift classroom power dynamics. Further, Joseph's comment that students had things that were "nagging them" suggests that a purpose of education might also be to help students work through prior issues, experiences, or traumas.

Ray Miller echoed the belief shared by Joseph Bathanti, that students today more frequently share stories of psychological and emotional trauma and mental health issues now

than even a few years ago. We discussed the nature of trusting the issues and stories that our students share with us in confidence, and whether we run the risk of our sympathy and compassion being taken advantage of. He emphasized that his sympathy need not depend upon a student's honesty and that his concern for students' well-being may serve as a catalyst for their hard work in his classes in the future:

[John] It's funny. . . I've been teaching at App for about seven years now, and. . . I'd say in the last year or so, I've had more students who aren't shy about their own mental health. Let's say.

[Ray] Hear hear. Hear hear.

[John] And so it seems to be that issues of anxiety and depression, at least on the surface of formal communication, have spiked.

[Ray] Hear hear.

[John] Considering that our students are battling depression, or relationships, or all of these big things, we've got to respect [and hold] a sacred space for... these fragile young people in this world, who are looking to kind of figure out their way.

[Ray] That's right, that's absolutely correct. More frequently, in my conversations with students, that's when I hear about coming out stories. That's when I hear 'I was raped when I was' dadada," gesturing a certain number of years old. "These are huge things. We are not talking about some of the things that would now be considered, ah, rather moderate. And they are willing to talk about that to a professor who they don't know from Adam. Except that they obviously have a feeling that I can trust you with that information.

[John] This may be overly insensitive, but do you think they are willing to talk about these things in hopes of gaining leniency with my professor?

[Ray] Do I think there is a potential for manipulation? Oh absolutely, no doubt about it—and, would I even be able to be sophisticated enough to pick that up? No, probably not. Okay, that's what I have for you. Now what you do with it, that's up to you. And so I feel that when a student comes in, particularly if they are coming in with things that are really.... really difficult, I can't worry about "am I being

manipulated” for whatever reason: to get sympathy, or a higher grade or whatever. I need to respond to that as honestly as I can. And then it’s going to be up to that student. Because if they walk away and go “Wow, this professor is really trying to listen to me,” maybe that’s going to change the conversation they have later with the next person.” (RM)

By allowing compassion to inform his student centered approach to education, Ray Miller explained to me that he is hoping to create a space where students are inspired to work their hardest in spite of whatever challenges they may be facing outside of the course.

There Are Many Ways to do Your Thing

At the very end of my interview with Billy Schumann, I asked him if he could share any final thoughts about how we might best prepare our to take their place in the 21st Century. His reply reflected a desire to help students discover interconnections between fields of study. He told me that he encouraged his students to find ways to leverage the information and ideas they may learn about in courses with him, to do their own “thing” later in life to engage with the world:

I think talking openly about them, again I’m an anthropologist and social scientist, so talking openly about social dynamics and issues is kind of germane to teaching... Helping people understand interconnection. . . I think that skillset is important, encouraging students to not only know about interconnections but how they are a part of them. And how they are effected [and] affected, and how they change. So that they have a sense of a path that they could follow. And to come back to something I said to start off today. There are a lot of different ways to do your thing, so I’m not trying to prescribe a particular path to student or to anybody else but. Understand that, whatever path you walk, you need to have a realistic way of then engaging in the world with that perspective, with that knowledge. That’s important, whether you even work in your degree area or not, that should still inform how you engage with the world within work and beyond it. (BS)

Billy's comments suggest that he values a student centered approach to education because it encourages students to see how they fit within larger social, political, economic, and environmental conversations. In this way, his response to my question was that the best way to prepare students for an unknown future is to get them to know themselves and then to know how they relate to other people and other cultural systems.

As Tom Hansell and I were discussing the role of students in the learning experience, he shared with me his growing sensitivity to the power dynamics at play in a classroom. He described his awareness of the ways in which his attention to, or neglect of, individual students can have a significant impact on their autonomy and efficacy:

Now that I'm thinking about it. . . I recognize the privileged position that we have as college professors and see the value [and] the difference we can make in students. I think I'm a little more aware that if I'm ignoring a student, that I am essentially denying opportunity. And when I am paying attention, or if I can see a way to connect a student an opportunity, that that's really a huge payoff. And I think I wasn't quite as aware of that when I started, because I didn't see, over time, how much difference that makes. (TH)

As I listened to Tom Hansell describe the changes he has noticed in his approach to teaching, I noted his concern for—and desire to—lift up and celebrate students. He described his quest to elevate the self-esteem and confidence of his students as both an opportunity and an obligation. To me, Tom Hansell's comments suggest that he perceives his role as an educator in the 21st Century as being a responsible for acknowledging and lifting up the individual students with whom we interact. Individuals who will lead the world in the not-so-distant future.

Conclusion

In my weaving together of quotes and analysis for this first vignette, I perceived my task as a balance and mix of letting the voices of my participants speak for themselves, and weaving and connecting stories—that I viewed as most relevant—together in an intentional way, informed by my perceptions as well as my developing understanding of scholarly literature, theory, and history. While engaging in conversations with Faculty Fellows and coordinators of the BMCS, and in reviewing documents related to the history and legacy of the BMC, I noted the prominent and consistent theme of placing students at the center of education. I noticed what I perceived to be a logical progression of the main ideas of the stories I classified within this theme: 1) a student centered philosophy of education necessitates fundamental shifts in power from models of education based in knowledge acquisition; 2) as such, a student centered philosophy requires learners to be given the freedom and latitude to explore their own interests. Within this point, learners must also be prepared and feel empowered to lead and manage their own educational process, and within this, teachers must feel comfortable relinquishing control; and 3) ideally, emerging from such academic freedom is the learner who is curious about the world around them and becomes able to solve a range of problems in the world by leveraging innovation, creativity, and community. Further, education based in student interests has the ability to “resuscitate” even those who we as a society consider to be “lost causes” (Bathanti, personal communication, November 18th, 2018). Yet, each quoted I curated suggests that a student centered approach

to education also operates within an ever-present and underlying tension between academic structure and freedom.

A student centered approach to education transfers power away from the teacher and gives that power to the learner. At BMC, this tension existed not only in the ways the College stood out by rejecting social and structural norms, but also in the ways it conformed to them. For instance, as BMC was not accredited, they sought out faculty from accredited institutions to assess the few students who applied to graduate (Reynolds, 1998, p. 135). From this vantage point, I perceive BMC as suspended by a tension between a desire to be free, a desire to be acknowledged by the greater academic community of the day, and perhaps most importantly by a desire to ensure the success of its students.

Unlike education at BMC, Faculty Fellows and coordinators of the BMCS operate within a highly structured educational system and can only work to prioritize student freedom to the extent possible within that greater structure. Jason Miller (personal communication, November 18th, 2018) acknowledged that he does not teach “in a lecture hall with one hundred students” and that he likely could not enact his student centered approach to education if he was. Perhaps even more fundamentally, all faculty at Appalachian State University in 2018 functioned within the same structure of the academic calendar. Within that structure, all scholarly endeavors must begin and end at predetermined times, complete with grades, grade point averages, and (hopefully) diplomas and degrees. Nonetheless, Faculty Fellows and coordinators of the BMCS described many ways in which their classes

tried to embody the spirit of freedom and curiosity that vaulted the BMC into an iconic status.

Chapter 5: Research Findings

Vignette 2: Community-Minded

In this chapter, I weave together quotes from past and present educators regarding the importance of cultivating community in higher education. Findings in this chapter emphasize the vitality of being community-minded when seeking to design meaningful educational experiences. Yet, the elements of community and the ways in which it was expressed varied notably across the two eras of education that I explored.

It Almost Doesn't Matter What You Are Trying to Talk About

Jeff Goodman described how a community minded approach to education can “inspire leadership in others.” During our conversation, he shared with me that community building was perhaps the most important component—or central element--of his philosophy of teaching. In the following excerpt from our conversation, he shares his belief that a successful classroom community can only be achieved with the support and guidance of a good teacher:

So, if you have a class where things are going really well, or a group where things are going really well. It almost doesn't matter what you are trying to talk about. . . And I think that the role of the teacher is really important in developing that sense of community. It doesn't develop without some facilitation. They are not like the king of it, but they need to facilitate it and there are a bunch of different techniques [teachers] can do to facilitate community. So enthusiasm shows up when you have a community that has established that as a norm. (JG)

In listening to his ideas, I noted that Jeff's attention to community is rooted in a desire to position students in leadership roles in their education, but to do so by peaking their curiosity

about the workings of the world around them. In creating an environment where each person feels like a leader and authority, each individual also feels comfortable with being in dialogue and sharing ideas with their classmates.

Democracy in Action

In reviewing texts related to the organizational structure and educational philosophy of BMC, I came across a scanned document entitled, “Organizing and Procedures,” (1933) in which founder John Andrew Rice described the context and learning environment of the College. In the following passage from that document, Rice describes the nature and value of community at BMC as being most notable in the lived experiences outside of the classroom:

One might say that the dining room is the center of the College, for here you can see most clearly at work most of the ideas and devices on which the College at present relies. At the ringing of a bell – this bell. . . all of us, students and faculty, go to the dining room and seat ourselves wherever we choose, at one of the eleven tables, each containing eight places. ((In the course of a fortnight each one of us will probably have sat at least one meal with every member of the College)). Someone tips a chair up and goes out to the kitchen for the food. Later on, someone else will clear the table and remove the dishes, and others will bring on dessert and coffee. All this is done voluntarily, alike by students and Faculty. The absence of student waiters, or waiters of any kind, makes possible the continuing of a conversation to the satisfaction, or exhaustion, of those who take part in it. Into the dining room flow ideas that have been let loose in classroom or study, and it is here that some of the best teaching and learning in the college is done. I should not like to give you the impression, however, of a group of people perpetually engaged in serious conversation, for folly has its place even in education. (p. 1-2)

Through Rice’s words, I gained a sense that community at BMC was shaped as much by informal conversations interactions as it was by any formal educational experiences. BMC was described by renowned progressive educator, John Dewey (1940) as a “living example of democracy in action,” (para. 1) where learning existed as a synthesis of individual and

community endeavors. Reynolds (1998) describes John Andrew Rice's view of community at BMC as "inescapable" (p. 129) and noted that the group of individuals living there had no choice but to be tight nit:

Rice believed that education happened all the time—in and out of the classroom, in serious and silly moments—especially for those who observed and analyzed what was taking place. He later described Black Mountain as a place where there was "no escape" from education and where "a man taught by the way he walked, the sound of his voice, by every movement. That was what it was intended to be, the fulfillment of an old idea, the education of the whole man: by a whole man." By Rice's estimate, two thirds of the value of Black Mountain College for its students derived from what happened outside the classes. Of course, Rice's convictions about education perfectly reflected his own style. He favored unstructured conversation and interaction well above formatted classes or sustained, scholarly exposition; and he excelled at creating teaching moments at unexpected times. (p. 129)

These passages reveal the ways that community at BMC was experienced and cultivated both in and beyond the classroom. In contrast, Faculty Fellows and Coordinators of the BMCS at Appalachian State University experienced community as something existing primarily in relationship to formal educational experiences and spaces. As the classroom was the place where faculty most frequently interacted with their students, the spirit of community that was described by participants related to building comradery, critique, and celebration within their courses, and within the duration of a class period.

In her biography of John Andrew Rice, Reynold's (1998) included quotes from students describing the kind of community experienced at BMC, and the ways it stood in contrast to the culture of other educational institutions:

Students quickly found they enjoyed the opportunity for education at every turn. "You could just sit down with Albers or Rice and talk," recalled Norman Weston many years later... "It was a wonderful setting for learning." Robert Sunley, who

transferred from Oberlin, also remarked on the ease of interchange, noting, “At Oberlin, the faculty taught their courses and that was it. They were gone, and students were herded into a separate world. Black Mountain was so different and exactly what I wanted.” (p. 130)

In this student’s comments, I sensed the value that students perceived in spending quality time with their professors outside of formal educational situations. In this way, I noted that the nature of community at BMC stood apart from other institutions of higher education of its day, and continues to be distinguished from the majority of contemporary educational contexts.

A Community of Brilliant and Inimitable Students

Faculty Fellows and coordinators of the BMCS collectively described the community as a mechanism through which to inspire, support, and challenge students. From the very beginning of our conversation, Joseph Bathanti stressed the importance of community in educational experiences. We began our conversation with me explaining the purpose of my study, and my enthusiasm for learning more about BMC and the BMCS. I explained that, through these interviews, I hoped to gain an understanding of the “spirit” of each person’s classroom. He replied in a way that I felt affirmed my approach to this project and offered his take on the importance of this term:

Yeah, I like the idea of the spirit of the classroom. I mean, that’s a wonderful way to put it. Because if the classroom doesn’t have a spirit. . . I don’t know, it doesn’t have a heart, and often you flail around. (JB)

Joseph then offered the metaphor that, as a teacher he is like a football coach teaching his Black Mountain class as if he was working with a team of athletes. He described how groups

sometimes collectively possess a “chemistry” that transforms the learning experience to a greater extent than the teacher or curriculum alone ever could:

I was just a coach: that I had exactly eleven students in that class, which makes a football team etcetera. And, maybe you’re the same coach every year, and you have extraordinary aspirations for the championship every year, but I had eleven athletes this year who were... just extraordinary, inimitable. And it was just because, whatever the chemistry was, a lot of it is mysterious. In a classroom—as you know, you teach yourself. Why is this class—I hesitate to say better—but, why is this class maybe evolving more organically and in spectacular ways? Why are they gelling as a community? Why is love emanating from them? Because I really do believe that love is at the heart of a really vibrant classroom. I don’t know, it appears in the ether. And Vera Williams, one of the Black Mountain Luminaries, even mentioned in her remarks, somewhere down the line, I think later in life—post Black Mountain—that “without love, there is no education,” you know, certainly without intimacy, you know. So surprising things happen, which I’d be glad to... you know, hold forth on. But you are the interviewer. (JB)

Although I was anticipating Joseph’s ideas about community to be in line with the philosophy of BMC, I appreciated his contemporary take on it. I wanted to find out how faculty teaching in the 21st century perceived education and these remarks served as a poetic synthesis of past and present. For me, his description of a “spectacular” group of learners illuminated the role of the teacher as the designer of spaces where interpersonal connections—teacher and learner, learner and learner, learner and community—can thrive.

As we continued this discussion, he described his overarching educational philosophy, and the specific ways in which students in his class worked as a community to shape the arc of their scholarship:

Educating the whole person. Making students responsible for their own learning. That I wanted them to come out as, more as ample citizens than anything else. How do we do this? And so it became a kind of cooperative class, a kind of dialogue, with a few really dynamic people, who began to broach those kinds of conversations in the

classroom. They wanted to talk about vulnerability. We did all kinds of unconventional things. We had class in all sorts of unconventional places. When things weren't going in exactly the way that we. . . that I. . . When things weren't going exactly right. I would say, "I don't think anything is happening here today." "How are we doing?" "What are we doing?" We really kind of, I hesitate to use the word "family" but had kind of the candid discussions that you have with people you really care about and people you really trust. (JB)

I took note of Joseph's use of the word "family" to describe the close and tight knit nature of community that existed amongst that particular group of students. He continued by describing the ways in which that community was able to leverage their collective chemistry to build connections between one another.

But little by little it happened. That we became kind of a community. Like minded, shared purpose, shared zeal. And I think more than anything—because of all the personal stories we told each other—we started out talking a lot about who we were, where we were from, what our educational experiences had been in the past. They began to learn things about one another that, um, precluded anything but intimacy. They began to care about each other and they are still staying crazily in touch. (JB)

For me, these comments highlight the inherent connections between the Student Centered and Community-Minded themes of my findings. By virtue of focusing on the needs of each individual in the classroom—as discussed in Chapter 4—Faculty Fellows and coordinators of BMCS, along with educators at BMC, seemed to automatically begin to develop an awareness of, and attention to, the needs of the group as a community. Joseph's teaching philosophy utilizes personal storytelling and enthusiasm as mechanisms for nurturing and growing a community-minded intellect.

He continued by describing the ways he sought to make himself “invisible” as a means by which to provide learners with freedom and with a chance to build community with one another:

It’s not something that I did, it’s something that I kind of allowed to happen, and I kind of tried to get as invisible as I could in the class. I was an observer. Certainly I [he laughs] knifed in at the times that I had to and I was certainly organizing things. I had them grade some of their own assignments, you know. Some things went ungraded... I allowed them to design very autobiographical final projects: something they were passionate about. I didn’t want them doing, you know, meaningless work, to fill in blanks. No teacher does. (JB)

Although he denies that he played a significant role in creating this vibrant community, his comments reveal that his teaching strategy was to provide the class with the latitude and freedom to define their own identity as a group and then to use that identity to shape the agenda for the course. Joseph’s insight into the value of fostering vibrant communities reveal both his attitude towards education and what he values about the legacy of BMC.

In concluding this story, he summed up the ways the BMCS—as an ongoing event—further substantiated student’s interest in both the history, and the spirit of learning occurring at BMC:

The other thing that was great about the class, and will never recreate itself, is that we had the BMCS too, so they were absolutely inundated, immersed, and strangled by BMC lore. We had all those speakers. I knew them all. I had the students to my house when the speakers were there. I took them out to dinner with the speakers so they were able to rub elbows with literally, some living legends. Those folks visited my class. (JB)

No doubt that the BMCS provided an unprecedented context and backdrop for student learning and community growth. Joseph Bathanti’s comments suggest that central to his

approach to teaching and learning is a focus on group dynamics and their transformative potential.

Think of Teaching as Learning

At the beginning of my conversation with Ray Miller, I asked him to tell me about how he came to the profession of teaching. He shared with me that his background, experience, and formal education in the performative arts emphasized the importance of curiosity, of learning, and of appreciating the role of teaching in refining one's creative practice:

[John] How did you become a teacher?

[Ray] There is this guy. His name is Michel Saint-Denis. He is a theatre director from France. And he was one of the people who got together with John Houseman and this other person to create [the] Julliard school. And [they asked], "What is the nature of art making?" and "What is the nature of teaching and learning?" And "How does that feed back and forth?" ...and so for me, that was really a valuable perspective—as I was coming out of high school and moving into college—to think about the relationship between art making and teaching and learning. And those two things go like that [connects his hands together]. (RM)

In Ray's comments, I noted his desire to view the process of becoming a teacher as a holistic pursuit. In this way, the vocation of being a teacher, or of being a learner, necessitated his first accumulating real-world experiences, which could then be brought into the classroom. As he continued speaking, he discussed a recent article that he had published, in which he critiqued the oppressive relationships and structures of power that often dominate educational contexts:

I wrote an article for Theatre Topics a couple of years ago, in which the questions I was asking was, "For those of us who teach theatre history or dance history: Why is it

that you can go into a dance technique class, or an acting class, and the students are not looking for ‘when is this class going to be done?’ Or, ‘is that going to be on the test? Do I really have to learn that?’ No! When you are in an acting class, or you’re in a dance class, or you’re in a rehearsal, you don’t ask, ‘When is the rehearsal going to end?’ You get fired up about an idea, and then you run with that sucker with everything you’ve got, and if it spills over in terms of time, great. (RM)

Ray’s comments suggest an approach to education that hinges upon a learner’s engagement and enthusiasm. I noted the ways that his comments seemed to push back against the established structures of formal education, which comprise of fixed starting and stopping points. He went on to describe the ways such formal structures in education create “antiseptic” learning environments that are not informed by the interests and experiences of the learner:

Um, and do they care about what the teacher thinks in terms of evaluation, yeah, as an opinion. But they also care what their peers think. If it’s going to be done in front of the public, they care what the public thinks. Those are the feedback. But when it comes inside of a dance history class, now it’s very antiseptic. Now the question becomes, “Okay who [usually] sets the agenda? The teacher. Who’s going to set the evaluative instrument? The teacher. What are you going to read?” The teacher sets that. And so now it becomes artificial. (RM)

In sharing this story, Ray Miller expressed to me his desire to change the educational dynamic, where the teacher has all of the power and knowledge and is in charge of the curriculum. His comment about the importance of peer-opinion points to the ways in which community support, encouragement, and inspiration can serve as a catalyst for efficacy and learner motivation. His final comments highlight the problematic nature of an authoritarian model of education, where a teacher sets the parameters. He continued by describing the steps he has taken in his own teaching practice to counter these predominant tendencies:

And it starts fundamentally, or at least what I have been experimenting with, is questions. So when the students come into the class... I say, “When you come into class tomorrow, I would like you to bring in three questions that are burning questions that you would like to have a response to—and you can only get that because you are studying dance history. What do you really really really want to know about? That you care about?” That’s a student generated question. Questions [they] came up with [were], “Ray, has there ever been a culture in which they did not dance?” Wow! What a question. So these questions come up at the very beginning of the semester, and then I grouped these questions into different categories for them. Put them out on the AsULearn site, and then try to structure the class in response the questions. I will get to the stuff that I think might be covered inside a dance history class, but now I’m using their questions to do that. (RM)

Ray’s comments speak to the steps he is taking in his own classroom to empower learners as a community to set the trajectory of their learning, thereby diminishing his presence as the only authority in the group. By anchoring his curriculum in questions generated by students, he is not only showing students that their voice and their interests matter in their education, but he is also increasing their buy-in to the pre-established curriculum of the course.

Community and Cupcakes

Several participants commented on the ways that the spirit of BMC inspired them to be more creative and playful in their teaching. During my conversation with Jody Servon, she shared a story with me about a time when she had to bring her two children, and thirty cupcakes, to class with her. This event took place on a day when her son’s class was scheduled to celebrate his birthday, but public schools were cancelled due to snow. She shared this story to relay how she makes an effort to share her identity—not just as a teacher, but also as a human being with a life and family. In responding to her story, I shared with her how much I felt students likely appreciate these moments:

[John] I can just picture that . . . sometimes you are going to bring in an experience that no one really expects, but we are kind of all the richer for it. I can only imagine that they find value in that.

[Jody] I guess the Black Mountain Semester also made me think, just being a little bit more playful with some of it. So the classes that I've been teaching aren't the most playful. We think about looking at playful works in art and different kinds of creative expression. That semester I said, "okay we are just going to do things that are... approach things really differently..." I gave them some exercises to do that challenged them. That made them think beyond themselves and what they were going to do and made them think in terms of the group and then struggle. (JS)

Jody's comments illuminate the playful environment that she sought to foster within her BMCS course. In her role as a teacher, she strived to position learners to be experimental, to follow their own intuition, but also to work collaboratively. As we continued our conversation, she recalled a moment in the semester when one group's experience with an interpersonal conflict became a major part of their learning experience:

And that semester there was a group that didn't quite get along, and how you are going to work through that. Right? Because, in the workplace. . . you don't always get along with [everyone] and you don't have always have the agency or the autonomy to say "Okay, I'm going to do this project by myself." And everybody else is just going to do nothing? And so that made me think a little bit differently about helping [to] support them. But also not just letting them give up on each other. . . So that process, with the group that didn't get along, I think was much more meaningful than the product. And the other ones got to a place where, things were clicking along and things got further along in the product. Because they didn't have to deal with some of the interpersonal issues that the other group had. But they were both really meaningful. (JS)

By embracing this group conflict as a teachable moment, Jody was able to position collaboration and interpersonal dialogue as central elements of the curriculum. In this way, her community-minded approach to teaching and learning involved an acceptance that the

curriculum sometimes becomes as much about group dynamics and relationships as it about the subject being taught.

A Fifteen Week Office

Similarly, when I asked Jason Miller to describe what things have changed in the time that he has been teaching, he likened the collaborative spirit of his classroom to a “15 week office,” with students learning and working as a collective on the job:

My personal approach is transitioning from thinking of a classroom as a classroom, to thinking of it as a fifteen week office, and saying, “everybody’s going to end up having a role. Sometimes, you might end up doing scopes of work individually, and you have to wear all the hats, or, here’s another piece, or another problem. Now, each of you is in a team, and every one of you is wearing one of those hats, and you have to come at it from that perspective, in order to realize the solution. (JM)

I noted a spirit of teamwork and differentiated learning in Jason’s comments: where products were built amidst a process-based learning experience. Not only did he describe his students as members of a team, but each team member was positioned to experience multiple jobs, and wear multiple “hats,” throughout their experience. In this way, the project-based nature of Jason’s courses necessitated an active and experiential approach to teaching and learning. Although a community-minded approach to education was a value expressed by all participants, the practice of the educational community appeared noticeably different within each curricular context—from office, to studio, to classroom.

Avant-Garde Performance Art

Similarly, Christina Sornito described how her community-minded approach teaching led to an avant-garde political statement during her class’s performance of *The Reuse of*

Medusa as a tribute to BMC. During our conversation, she shared a story of the teambuilding activity that occurred during rehearsals, where one exercise led to a new addition to their performance. Although the activity began as a means of building connection between students, over time it transformed into an experience of scholarly and social expression:

We always began our rehearsals with an exercise where we would throw a ball at each other. One by one, and then I would introduce another ball. And for each ball, they had to. . . One was a color, they had to call out a color and throw it out to someone. And the second ball might have been a name, and then they had to throw that to someone. So we had all these balls going through the air. And it was about creating synergy within the group. That we can cooperate, that we can work together, that we can be a working unit. And then eventually, those words were substituted for, as I was saying before, these events. Of state violence, and so then, that's when the idea of being experimental really hit them. They were like, "Oh what! We are doing this exercise!" And then all of a sudden, Pink became Freddie Gray. You know... And then it hit them, like what had just happened to them. They made a piece of political theatre in the idiom of Avant Garde theatre. (CS)

Christina explained that this activity was initially established as a way for students get to know one another, to "cooperate," to "work together" and to be a "unit." These words are a powerful summation of the importance of community-minded learning in the 21st Century. She described how the rising energy in the room resulted in an educational experience informed by a synthesis of improvisation, current events, and scholarship. I viewed her story as a demonstration of how community interaction can result in spontaneity as well as in generating new ideas and directions within an educational experience.

Creating a Space Where People Want to Be Present

Faculty Fellows and coordinators of the BMCS also described how a community-minded approach to education served as a means by which to hold a place for students to

build relationships with each other and with the curriculum. In describing her teaching style, Jody Servon shared with me that her primary goal in the classroom was to create opportunities for students to exchange ideas and build projects with one another. She explained to me that as a result of noticing students struggling with interpersonal relations, she began to search for ways to build collaboration between learners whenever possible. She told me that she now intentionally arranges the chairs in her classroom space as a means of encouraging presence and discouraging distraction:

I try to create a time and a space where people want to be there and be present. I set the room up. We have it in kind of a “U” shape. So that everybody sees each other, and I talk about it early in the class saying, “if you put this barrier up [pretends to be holding a phone], right, are you participating in the same kind of way?” And this semester I even said, “We can see you.” If you are down like this [gestures pretending to be on a phone] all the time, right, like it’s noticeable [laughs]. (JS)

As I listened to Jody’s comments, I noted that she described the ways in which her efforts to build community were impacted by the context of teaching in a day and age where students are constantly tempted towards distraction by the ICTs they bring to class with them. In referring to a student looking down at their knees—distracted by their phone—she illuminated the role technology plays today in dividing attention and diminishing classroom presence.

She continued by describing an activity she tried out on the day of our interview that she feels was successful in building community amongst learners. She explained that the activity grew out of a frustration she felt related to the ineffectiveness of icebreaker and introductory name game activities that she uses at the beginning of the semester:

[In] an icebreaker at the start of the semester, where people introduce themselves. What is really memorable from any of those? Like somebody may get a little more comfortable talking, but [of] what people shared, how much of that information sticks? If somebody says their name, and where they are from and their major, you might be like, “oh that person is from Durham too” but beyond that, I haven’t found them the most useful. (JS)

Her comments seemed to be suggesting that icebreaker activities typically fail because they come off, as Ray Miller described, as “antiseptic” (Ray Miller, personal communication, January 9th, 2019). She went on to describe an activity she designed to increase the meaning and value of this experience:

So I asked them to do, six images paired with six words to describe themselves in Google Slides. They did a presentation and I think we learned so much. . . about where [and] how people see themselves. What kinds of experiences they’ve had. What kinds of ways are they looking at image making? Or are they grabbing images from online? What is [the] scope and lens that they are using? (JS)

This story offered a salient example of the ways Jody strived to prioritize community in her classroom. By setting up the classroom in a “U” shape, Jody leveraged the physical structure of the classroom to cultivate dialogue, presence, and relationships. In a circular space, students can connect with one another in an organic and authentic way, encouraging and cultivating dialogue and creative expression. Further, by positioning students to share images and stories in an expressive and digital space, Jody was also acknowledging and leveraging contemporary social and communication contexts for the purposes of building a more deeply informed community.

The Spirit *is* the Group

I asked Jody to describe the spirit of her classroom. In her response, she expressed her underlying desire to connect student's previous experiences and prior knowledge with new information and ideas:

I think it really varies each semester. When you teach, there are some groups of people that really click with each other and it feels, um, collegial and energizing in a way, and sometimes, I mean we all have those classes where it's a great group of people that have just gelled together and it's [still] just, is dull, right? And I think that people would probably say that there's a range of experiences, that... people are looking beyond what a they expected to be experiencing, that there's some new ways of thinking that have been opened up. (JS)

Jody's comments suggest that meaningful educational experiences can enhance community bonds and the spirit of learning taking place in the classroom.

As we continued talking, she described her desire to humble students with an understanding and appreciation for the creative and innovative thinkers that have come before them:

[Jody] . . . we think we're so innovative. You know, like you look at Black Mountain, and [then when] people are like, "Oh, we should do this new thing," and [I say], "Well, did you think about this? That was done how many years ago?" Right, like we are not all that progressive in many ways, right like we have technology that has impacted what we are able to do, but the modes and methods haven't really shifted in 100 years. And that, I think, is really important for them to make sense of. Because they'll say, "Oh this is cutting edge!" And I'll say, "Well take a look at this work from 1970." And they are like "oh somebody was doing that. . .?" And I'm like, "right!"

[John] It's like, "yeah this idea may be good" or even, "yeah this idea may be cutting edge, but it's been cutting edge for a while now."

With these comments, I began to appreciate the ways that Jody wanted students to perceive themselves as connected with the great thinkers who came before them in the profession or vocation they are studying. By positioning students to understand how their “new ideas” are influenced by, and grow out of, the work of previous artists and scholars, Jody Servon is welcoming students into the greater community of the art world.

She concluded by describing her role as a teacher being like a “guide,” and expressing her desire to cultivate opportunities in her classes for collaboration. A skillset which she feels is challenging for many students to master:

[Jody] So I guess.... Hmm, the spirit is... to feel like a group. Not just student and teacher. But I also . . . lead the class. In a way, like I guide the ship.

[John] Sure.

[Jody] I’m trying to always give more opportunities for them to work together and knowing that that’s a big struggle for many of them. They feel like, “Okay if I do this, then I will get this. And [I know] what the expectation is. And it’s mine. And nobody else can mess it up.

[John] Yeah, I bet that’s particularly true in an arts setting.

[Jody] Yeah. (JS)

Jody’s comments suggest that cultivating collaboration and building community are as important in her courses as the specifics of her curriculum. Her metaphor of feeling like a “guide” steering a “ship” powered by the collective interests of her classroom community is directly aligned with social, progressive, and critical models of education (Dewey, 1938/1997; Freire, 1970/2003; Vygotsky, 1978), and with the educational philosophy championed at BMC (Rice, 1933). In this way, across the participants with whom I spoke, a

community-minded approach to education seems as essential in today's educational contexts as it was a century ago.

Wow, What a Story! And I've Got One Too

Several participants described the role storytelling played in enabling students to first represent an aspect of their identity, and then to share that representation with a community of peers. In his reply to my question about the role of storytelling in his courses, Joseph Bathanti described the ways that aesthetically sharing your experiences, backgrounds, and identities is as important as any other element of his curriculum:

And that's oversimplifying it, but that's what story means to me. Being in a room and telling your story and having other people acknowledge [you]. Not only that, yeah wow what a story, and I got one too. And that we are jointly human. We are aligned in this way: I have a mother, you have a mother. I'm from a place, your from a place. My heart broke, your heart broke. This is my sexual orientation, this is your sexual orientation. (JB)

Joseph's comments suggest that his community-minded focus not only enabled the development of rapport and comradery between learners, but also helped them to approach their education from a place of personal experience. Such an approach also leads students to be accountable to themselves and to one another, in that, if they don't show up for class, the community doesn't exist.

Keep Stuff in Play

As Jeff Goodman expanded on the elements involved in his community-minded approach to education, he stressed that teachers must facilitate healthy debate, teach students to respectfully disagree, and position them to find common ground with one another:

[Jeff] Our ability to have good conversations with each other and to keep knowledge alive and contextualized knowledge is the most important thing to having a healthy society. Like the ability... to be able to participate in communal problem solving [and] democratic process. [Which] requires people who not only have a little bit of information, but are comfortable enough working with other people and other people's ideas. And care enough and are curious enough to keep stuff in play.

[John] And are kind of willing to be spontaneous. Like you said, "It's living." You have to sort of recognize that the next current event will be, current. It's not predictable.

[Jeff] Right, and if it is, it's still a unique thing that is new in the world, in that moment. And so, you've constantly got to be able to think through things in a new way, or even reassess your own values or your own, those concrete things that you've learned. (JG)

Jeff's comment that community assists learners in "keeping stuff in play" or not ruling out the opinions and beliefs of others suggests that his classroom strategies for cultivating community necessarily involve problem solving. In this way, Jeff's approach to building community involves the cultivation of respect for difference in opinions and beliefs.

Echoing these sentiments, Ray Miller explained to me that he believes teachers need to assist students in cultivating compassion and being open to opinions and values which might not align with our own:

So one of the things that I think that you and I know is a part of our job now, in 2018, is to model for the students how [to] have conversations with people who think differently, feel differently, are different from you. How do you do that? In ways that are not superficial, but meaningful. And right now we are not seeing that in our national politics. We are not seeing that a lot of times, even in our families, so this is a big deal right now. [A] really a big deal. Boy that's hard stuff. (RM)

Ray's comments suggest that he feels the most important job of the teacher is to attend to the array of voices within any given classroom, and to find ways to help them to be in

conversation with one another. In this way, Ray's reasons for being community-minded relate to a desire to bring together people with differing perspectives, and from different walks of life. He used the moment of our interview as an example in underscoring his belief that, without guidance, classrooms comprise little more than a room full of strangers:

Like right now, I don't know you and you don't know me, but we are trying to read each other in this conversation. Complicate that by you being in the role—or lens—of professor, and now you've got eighteen students up there. Woah! Eighteen people. Eighteen very different notions of reality... and you are trying to be sensitive to all of that as you are in the role of quote unquote teacher. (RM)

Underlying Ray's vision of community-minded learning as a necessary tool for solving the problems of tomorrow, is the notion that each student must respect the beliefs, values, and opinions of others in the class community. Even if—or perhaps especially when—those opinions do not align with our own. He went on to explain his belief that an individual's identity in today's world ought to relate to belonging to the community of planet Earth:

I think when I was younger I thought of myself as an American living within this particular country and environment. Now I think of myself as a world citizen and the notion of nationhood is just, it's still there. It's part of the past, it's part of... the way some people think about the world. But it's not, it's not nearly as meaningful as the notion of being an individual in the world responding to other individuals in the world. (RM)

This statement underscored his belief that community reaches far beyond the walls of the classroom, or even the borders between nations. Ray's comments reflect an understanding that cultivating community in the classroom enables students to better appreciate their role as a world citizen. In this way, a community-minded approach to education is expressed as a

means by which to instill the value of democratic citizenship both in and beyond the classroom.

Representation of Community Issues

During my conversation with Tom Hansell, I asked him to tell me his thoughts on the relationship between media making and democracy. I told him that from my perspective—as a media educator and as someone studying the role of creativity at BMC—I held the belief that media making and artistic expression in general were tools for democracy that were capable of illuminating alternative perspectives and otherwise marginalized voices. In his response, Tom shared his belief that educational programs that teach media production *can* do work that is democratizing, but only if they form alliances with local community organizations who can benefit directly from their work:

I just want to underscore how important it is for media and for the arts to be used in conjunction with community organizations that . . . are often non-arts but pro-people agenda[s]... And when those two get married together it can be incredibly democratizing and incredibly empowering. When they operate separately, I think that they kind of both lose a little bit of power. That art, just by itself, is you know.... can be somewhat democratizing. But it loses a little umph. (TH)

Tom's response suggests his skepticism towards the potential for media making to be an overly self-indulgent pursuit. Without creating stories that lift up underrepresented voices or perspectives—without teaching someone to use these skillsets who has otherwise been denied the opportunity to express their opinions—he feels that media making can devolve into a self-indulgent pursuit. Tom's comments suggest a belief that while media making as a

self-indulgent pursuit might not represent an act of social justice, however such skillsets can become tools for empowerment when performed for the benefit of community.

Conclusion

While the nature and context of community-minded approaches varied greatly across these past and present educational contexts, a unifying value and intention of community was prominent across both. At BMC, the descriptions of community I noted seemed to be the result of the tight-knit and isolated environment within which faculty, students, and staff lived. In addition to the intimate nature of the daily educational experiences, the entire college came together each evening to share meals and entertainment with one another. I was particularly moved by John Andrew Rice's (1933) comments where he suggested that "over the course of a fortnight" each person would eat dinner and share conversation with every other member of the College. The shared dining, work, and educational experiences collectively shared at BMC were no doubt what prompted Dewey (1940) to hail the college as a "living example of democracy in action."

In contrast, the community-minded sentiments expressed by Faculty Fellows and coordinators of the BMCS were primarily related to the interactions they had, or strived to develop, with students and curriculum during courses. At a midsized contemporary university like Appalachian State in the year 2018, students, faculty, and staff do not all know each other's names or faces outside of the context of the courses they share, and the places they work. They do not eat dinner together—at least not every night—nor do they routinely engage within one another outside of the context of the course.

Yet, community was described by multiple participants as “the most important part” (Goodman, personal communication, September 14th, 2018) of the educational philosophy. Importantly, the ways in which a community-minded approach to education was expressed by Faculty Fellows and coordinators of the BMCS seemed to be the product of this exact difference. As teachers do not typically know their students outside of the context of the course, they therefore need to make every effort to foster interpersonal and empathetic relationships between teachers and learners where none existed previously. In this way, I began to feel that the community-minded approach to education that was expressed by participants from the BMCS was a contemporary, and perhaps abstract, tribute to the type of learning that occurred at BMC. Like educators at BMC, Faculty Fellows and coordinators seemed to possess an understanding of the importance of cultivating relationships within small groups, and of striving to encourage closeness between individuals. As such, I noted that the type of community found at BMC could not be replicated at Appalachian State University in the 21st Century. Instead, contemporary educators must seek out opportunities to foster community when smaller groups of students and teachers gather.

Chapter 6: Research Findings

Vignette 3: Experiential Learning

Every moment there seemed alive in a way that few have since. This had to do with being asked to be fully awake, to be at a new threshold of perception, whether in class, in the work program, in our own work, or in the life of the community.

--Zommer, *Full circle: Making Fully Awake*

Experiential learning is a central tenant of progressive education (Dewey, 1938/1997; Rice, 1933). By virtue of establishing student centered and community-minded educational practices as central elements in their courses, the participants in my study positioned teaching and learning as an experience. In this vignette, I weave together quotes that describe the ways that the past and present educators in my study sought to design and foster experiential learning in their courses. While the stories I share pertain to theoretical abstractions as well as tales of lived experiences, the central theme of their messages remain consistent. From the BMC to the BMCS, educators have prioritized students to actively, creatively, and personally engage with their education.

A Vehicle to Insight

When I asked James Toub about his path towards the profession of teaching, he told me about his time studying the work of renowned Eastern European artist Oskar Kokoshka, and how this experience helped him begin to see education as “a way forward.” He shared with me what Kokoshka’s “School of Vision” (About The Academy, n.d.) represents to the

art world broadly, and how it relates to his teaching philosophy and practices as an educator today:

. . . but this idea of vision, which was at the center of his teaching—it was called the “School of Vision”—is all about seeing. And so the question is, “what do you see?” And the idea is that you use art is a way of seeing something beyond what is just literally there. To see something that gives you insight into the nature of whatever it is that you are looking at. And that art is a vehicle through which you can acquire that kind of insight that would give you a deeper understanding of a person you are looking at, or a landscape, or whatever. And through that insight you would then be able to have a fuller richer understanding of the world that would hopefully result in having greater empathy and compassion for things in the world, rather than not. And so that’s one of the ideas that was sort of guiding me. (JT)

James’ comments about the role of art in society are much in line with the educational philosophy of BMC, where a person’s ability—artist or not—to behold and create art was considered something to be cultivated. As he continued speaking, he described the joy that teaching brings him, and argued that independent thinking through experiential learning was path towards ensuring quality in education:

And certainly I’ve taken it to heart in my own efforts as a teacher. I’m not interested in just learning—you know—the facts. And the dates and all that, or learning a technique. They can be very important, but they can also get in the way. But I’m really more interested in the experience. The quality of the experiences you have and the ways those experiences impact your life and the way you think about things, that’s my role. And so I’ve just been so lucky to be able to do that for all my.... for a long time now. Haha. (JT)

In hearing James’ comments, I noted that process-based learning seems more likely leave a lasting impact on learners, because, as John Andrew Rice (1933) said, the learner “had something to do with it” (p. 5). He went on to describe how revising his entire BMCS course

to focus on the values and history of the BMC became rewarding for him, and served as a means by which to further express his own educational values:

. . . based on everything we've been talking about, [the BMCS] was an opportunity for me to be able to articulate some of these concerns of mine, and my sense of education, in the context of Black Mountain. And a lot of that fits. So, that was great and hopefully I'll get to teach the class again. (JT)

I felt his comments seemed to collectively underscore the value he sees in experiential learning, the personal fulfillment he receives from teaching in this style, and how the BMCS provided him with an opportunity to pursue these motivations. In this way, education served to both allow students to pursue their own interests and ideas, and to offer him an opportunity to share his beliefs about the overall goals of education.

More in the Box Than I Should Be

Similarly, Jeff Goodman explained to me that he took the BMCS as an opportunity to push himself as a teacher. We were discussing our mutual desire to foster playful learning in our Media Studies courses—we are colleagues in the Media Studies program in the department of Curriculum and Instruction (Media Studies, n.d.)—when he brought up the ways this very same playfulness proved to be a motivating factor in designing his BMCS:

You know, One of the things I really liked about BMCS, is that, I did the project in my STEAM class, which is a directed elective for elementary ed majors... So I thought, aw man, this class is a directed elective and nobody really cares if I do something that is really broadly playful. I need to push myself a little bit to do that. So that's why I decided to do the BMC thing. I thought, okay, this is a direction that I can sometimes lose. Sometimes I think I keep myself a little more in the box than I should... I took my opportunity with the BMCS to really add in an assignment that was... much more wide open... and I enjoyed that. It pushed me... [and] I thought that was sort of the spirit of Black Mountain. Because the teachers themselves were somewhat exploring and I didn't want to do something that I'd already done. I didn't

want to just adapt something that I'd already done to the Black Mountain College (JG).

As a teachers with nearly two decades of experiences teaching media and science courses, Jeff shared with me that he typically sought to refine and perfect his existing lesson plans and class activities, instead of inventing new ones. He does this as a means of ensuring that the students learn as much as possible through learning experiences he knows are effective. He therefore used the BMCS as an opportunity to do the opposite: to generate new lesson concepts and new ways of approaching his curriculum. His comments reflect not only his desire to improve the learning experience by establishing a more open, exploratory, and “playful” educational environment, but also connects his understanding to the ways that experiment and experience were at the heart of education at BMC.

Buckminster Fuller Probably Lectured

During my conversation with Jeff Goodman, we discussed what it must have been like to learn from—and alongside with—Buckminster Fuller as he explored and built Geodesic Domes during the 1948 BMC Summer Institute. Jeff shared with me his belief that even this level of experiential learning likely still involved a healthy amount of structure and content delivery, and that dome building with Buckminster Fuller was not a free-for-all:

[Jeff] I don't know what Buckminster Fuller's class was like, but I know he was teaching stuff. He wasn't just like whatever. He had ideas about domes and he had ideas about form, but he hadn't worked them out entirely. So the students were part of working them out, and the students were like, “Is it going to work? Is it going to.” He speculated.

[John] That must have been magical. He hadn't built a dome successfully until he was there right?" I asked.

[Jeff] I think so. And he had a bunch of other failures, like he tried this thing with venetian blinds that didn't work... So them seeing him struggle with it was probably a big part of their learning. It's interesting to think about all the dimensions of a successful progressive environment. (JG)

Jeff's comments point to the inherent tension in education that exists between academic structure and student freedom. Even amidst an ideal example of experiential learning—like a Geodesic Dome building class with Buckminster Fuller—Jeff pointed out that teachers still had to offer structure, guidance, and parameters to orient student exploration.

A Meta-Theory of Experiential Learning

As we continued talking, Jeff shared what he described as his “meta” theory of how people learn best. Although his theory isn't applicable to all learners, or every learning context, I noted that the ideas he shared could likely assist educators, seeking to cultivate experiential learning, across a range of curricular areas.

I asked him to tell me about how he got into the profession of teaching. He explained that both his mother and father were educators who instilled in him the notion that learning must be experiential, and informed by the learner's curiosity. He shared with me that they imparted in him a belief that learners must ask questions and be curious about the workings of the world around them. I told him that in my recent interview with James Toub, he had stressed the importance of “curiosity” as an essential ingredient in learning and for leading a productive life. This comment led us to discuss ways that curiosity can be cultivated in teaching and learning. Jeff shared that, in addition to his parents, he had attended a summer

camp, as a camper as a child and on staff as a young adult, that was “very much a Black Mountain Type of environment.” He explained:

Then I was on their staff too after. And I learned a lot about teaching and learning from being there. Because you know, we were putting on Edward Alby plays and doing folk dancing, and doing these science experiments. And you know it was this incredible... you would have like a class, and like a typical class in camp would be like [with a condescending voice] “archery,” or something like that. In this one it would be like, “Death Scenes” and we would all like do like improv on death scenes and different ways of doing death scenes, and maybe we’d read a movie line out from a script or a play. And we did a lot of farm work there and I learned how to weld, and I learned how to do carpentry... the whole spirit of the place was about creativity. (JG)

This environment seemed to instill in Jeff the values that he carries with him to this day. He went on to explain how these experiences led him to question under what conditions people learn best:

So by the time I was in college, I was already... really thinking about, “okay how do people learn?” And my experience... led me to put together what has become my approach to teaching ever since, which I would categorize as an experience that starts with people being curious. (JG)

Jeff ‘s belief that education must begin with a learner’s curiosity reinforced in me the idea that all actions in the classroom must be taken with the learner’s experience in mind. He next shared with me the specifics of how his teaching practice is based on the notion of helping people become curious about the world around them:

So... if a teacher was trying to facilitate this, they would need to figure out, “okay how do I become that enthusiasm engineer?” The person who engineers a classroom environment, in which people are enthusiastic to learn. So something that makes people curious. Often that’s because the community holds that as a value, so there’s a lot to creating a community that is by nature curious. That is, its identity is around curiosity. So that’s like a community piece right at the beginning. (JG)

Jeff's philosophy of education appeared to be simultaneously grounded in being community minded as a means of cultivating experiential learning. Moreover, his approach to education seemed to involve fostering an identity of experiential learning within the educational community, so that the mentality and spirit of the group became one informed by play and exploration. As we continued our conversation, he described the elements he sees as necessary for generating enthusiasm in learners:

. . . experiences in the real world with your body, that help you begin to answer some of the questions that you've gotten curious about. And then, a teacher, or some combination of a teacher and outside resources, who helps you begin to take data from those experiences, and reform them. So take that data and begin to abstract it maybe. (JG)

Jeff's ideas about education seemed to embody a spirit of creativity and experimentation: where the learner forms a hypothesis and collects data as a means of produces findings. Such a model of learning is anchored in student motivation and engagement with the task at hand. He continued by describing the social constructivist and science education principles that connect to his educational philosophy:

So in a science context, in science teaching, it has a pneumatic, a little way to remember it, it's called the 5 E's. you know, engage, explore, and explain together is when we kind of try to abstract it, expand or elaborate, that's when you apply it to a new situation. And you are evaluating it all along, so whether you talk about it with the 5 Es or if you just think about how we learn anything. (JG)

Although the principles of "The Five E's" were developed by and for science educators, they are applicable across a range of educational experiences. They also help to demonstrate the

ways that teaching and learning are broadly informed by acts of observation and experimentation.

Experiential Learning *Outside* the Classroom

He continued by sharing an example related to his time working on a farm at the summer camp in Michigan. In this scenario, Jeff and I imagine a scenario in which I needed to get work done on the farm, but I discovered that one of the tractors was not working. The example demonstrated how people in a real-world context might have a genuine and pressing need to solve a problem, which in turn increases a learner's investment in the process. He shared the types of questions or experiments that he thought I might try if I needed to solve this problem:

And so you're curious about the tractor. You have a need for this information. So you go to explore it. ... Maybe you feel different parts. Are different parts hot? You might need some information at that point when you are doing your exploration, like "what are these different parts?" You might look up a diagram of a tractor, you might get some different information. So then you get to try different things... So this clean 5 E sort of falls apart when you put it in the real word, but basically we are messing with stuff. (JG)

Jeff's story portrays how learners in real world contexts gather knowledge and information within their environment and then apply it as a means of solving a given problem. I was struck by his admission that the "clean 5 E sort of falls apart" when actually put into practice in a learning experience. I feel this description mimics the fluid and organic nature of the way people learn naturally outside of structured educational experiences. When learning occurs in a real life situation—like in the story with the tractor—the elements of the educational experience are interconnected and overlapping. In his comments about the

importance of experiential learning, Jeff emphasized that his goal was to bring similar authentic experiences into his classroom today.

Experiential Learning *Inside* the Classroom

These words were critical in establishing where our conversation went next. As we continued talking, I asked him to share his thoughts on the differences between learning in the field and learning in a traditional classroom setting:

[Jeff] So that's an example in a very real world context, but in a more educational context, let's say I want to teach: well do you want me to give you an example from a media class?

[John] Okay, I feel it's really hard to generate enthusiasm in a class where students walk in and they're busy from other things. And we've got an hour and fifteen minutes here. And so it's hard to get people to care as much as they would care if my tractor was overheating.

[Jeff] Well, okay.

[John] And so I'm curious, as you think about how you would apply it to science, or media, or any other traditional educational setting. What's it like to engineer that enthusiasm, or curiosity inside a classroom? (JG)

Through this line of questioning, I was seeking to better understand the unique context of teaching in a university setting, where class meetings are typically limited to around an hour long. How did he feel educators might assist students in being present, so that they might fully engage in their learning experience?

An Evolutionary Rationale

Jeff replied by sharing what he described as a “set of principles” that seemed to encompass his educational philosophy. The first principle involved understanding the

“evolutionary rationale” behind the way people learn and the subsequent importance of “novelty” and “mystery” in education:

So as a teacher, I have a bunch of experience from teaching. I’m curious about what makes people teach well... Now here’s my abstraction. Here’s where I kind of put it together as an idea... So, I have noticed... people are motivated by a set of things that have an evolutionary rationale. That is, they are things about the way we think that very likely come from human evolution, or they have aspects of them that come from human evolution. So for example, people are motivated by novelty, um mystery, those two things can kind of be put together. So why would you be motivated by novelty? (JG)

As a means of answering his own question, Jeff made up an example of a class of middle grade students walking into their classroom and being surprised to find radishes on the tables:

Like if you come in the room and there are a bunch of radishes on the table—and there never have been radishes on the table. [Students are] like, “why are there radishes on the table?” they want to know. Now, that makes sense from an evolutionary perspective. . . So I think we naturally are really motivated by things that are novel or things that are mysterious. So I think, ‘okay, create novelty and mystery.’ So if I’m teaching about adjectives and you have radishes on the table, [students] are like, ‘why are they there [radishes]? [Teacher says] I dunno.. [students say] can we eat em? [Teacher says] sure, they’re clean, you can eat em if you want. You can break them open, whatever. Write down some words that go with what you are noticing. Ah, they’re spicy they’re cold, they’re crisp, they’re red, they’re white inside. Oh, write those on the board. Those are all adjectives.’ Okay I’ve just grounded their experience in this physical thing. But I made them excited about it. I made them interested in doing it, because they are motivated by that mystery. (JG)

In this story of experiential learning in the classroom, Jeff is able to convey the ways in which mystery is an essential ingredient for cultivating enthusiasm. In my question, I wanted to gain an understanding of the context of education in the contemporary classroom, with its defined beginning and ending times and constrained location, versus what I felt represented a “real-world” and authentically progressive learning environment, such as the farm scenario.

During my research process, I came to know progressive education a practice that did not seem ideally suited for traditional classroom spaces. Yet, as the majority of classes in higher education settings occur primarily in environments that Ray Miller described as “antiseptic” (RM), I was interested in hearing from Jeff about the strategies he used to create meaningful educational experiences within the constraints of the space and time of an average class period or semester. In his remarks about his meta theory of learning, I noted his desire to design and enact learning experiences that make students want to explore, question, and engage.

He continued by drawing a distinction between exploratory learning and “free school,” arguing that the teacher plays a critical role in guiding students through seemingly unstructured educational experiences:

However, you can’t, you don’t want things to be totally chaotic, and a lot of times things won’t work. So... it’s not free school. It’s not just like what do you want to do today. Like I come in with an idea, and I’m dancing back and forth between what’s going to be experimental, and what is it that I know. And if you’ve taught for a long time you’ll have a lot more ability to be able to kind of discern ahead of time what is likely to be productive. (JG)

Jeff’s comments point to the ways that his educational philosophy of experiential learning is informed by a tension between academic structure and freedom. Effective educational experiences can only involve novelty, mystery, and play when the teacher is keeping an eye on the ways that the process informs the greater educational objectives.

He went on to share the second principle of his “meta theory” of education, related to the roles corporality and touch have in teaching and learning. Building on the themes of

novelty and mystery, he described the ways that physical movement and experiences with our bodies can generate engagement and enthusiasm in the classroom:

The second idea is that. . . people are motivated by things they can experience with their bodies. Okay. So things that they can see hear and touch, typically—taste sometimes—will be highly motivating and they will invoke curiosity, or invoke enthusiasm, or evoke attention really, ultimately. (JG)

Jeff's theory seemed to extrapolate the valuable details and elements of education as they manifested in the tractor story, and generalize them so that they could be applied to more organized and structured settings. In his comments, I gained a sense that his goal was to present his students with experiences inside the classroom that were more authentic or *real* to the world around them.

He continued by offering an example of the ways in which educational experience that directly involve physical and tactile actions can resonate deeply within the heart's and mind's of learners:

If you want to get kids to, learn about the number line, you know, having them walk it is better. So you might walk in backwards the day you are teaching about negative numbers. You walk in backwards that day, and then... they are like, "well why are you walking in backwards?" And you say, "I want to get you to act out something." and then they act out something and you say, "well which of these equations do you think I had you act out?" And now there is a little bit more mystery involved, but now somebody's got it involved in their bodies. (JG)

Through this example, Jeff demonstrated how a seemingly minute action—like walking backwards in a classroom—can have a profound impact on learner engagement and enthusiasm. He concluded by explaining that attention can also be created when students observe their classmates participating in a classroom activity or demonstration:

It doesn't always have to be your own body, by the way, watching somebody else's body invokes your mirror neurons, which then will create attention. So even if not every student is walking the number line every time, having some kid walk the number line will make that happen. (JG)

In his "second idea" about education, Jeff positions human senses, other than the eyes and ears, as central in education. By advocating for the use of touch, taste, and smell in teaching and learning, he is also drawing attention to the absence of these senses in what might be referred to as more traditional educational experiences. He argues that the use of our bodies in educational experiences leaves a lasting memory, which helps students build deep and meaningful connections with the curriculum.

As we continued our conversation Jeff shared the third element of his philosophy of education, highlighting the importance of community as a foundation upon which all other experiences in his classroom are built:

[John] And that increased mystery or engagement around "why are they walking backwards" more people are focused on that idea.

[Jeff] Exactly, so now I've got mystery, and I've got this idea of the body. And then, I think it's really important to think about community. And probably, that might even be the biggest one. So, if you have a class where things are going really well, or a group where things are going really well. It almost doesn't matter what you are trying to talk about. (JG)

Building on the themes of novelty, physicality, and community that comprise his "meta theory," Jeff concluded his explanation by adding a fourth element of active participation. In line with engaging the human senses in the educational process, he explained that for a learning experience to be effective, students must be personally involved in the process:

People need to have a chance to work with ideas, materials, the content *themselves*. They can't just watch somebody else do it. Ultimately, if they don't actually do something with their hands and their minds, their bodies and their minds and with one another, and the material... nothing happens. It's a show. . . but they won't actually learn anything. (JG)

For me, Jeff's emphasis on the personal experiences of the learner underscore his earlier statement that learning should involve the movement of the body and our senses. In order for a learner to retain and apply knowledge, an educational experience must involve their opinions and actions directly.

To conclude our discussion related to his meta-theory of learning, I asked Jeff to share his thoughts on the inherent tensions that exists between learning as free exploration and learning as structured and scripted by the teacher. He replied by sharing his belief that the teacher plays multiple roles in any given education experience, always with the goal of modeling how students can explore and learn about future topics on their own. Summarizing his theory of learning, he stated that the reason that structure must be present in education is that we—as a society—are standing on the shoulders of the great thinkers, ideas and inventions that have come before us:

What I like to do is the spirit of constructivism with a nod towards the role of the teacher being to model how one goes about setting up problems and solving them... To model to students how to begin to tell their own stories. The teacher has all these roles, beyond, "here's the problem and you solve it," and you all will construct knowledge. So a purely constructivist—and this is why I'm not a pure constructivist—[in] a purely... hard and fast approach, the teacher wouldn't say anything. They just sort of ask questions... but [they work to minimize their presence]. People in science ed. say, "yeah constructivism is great, but if a kid has to invent the concept of photosynthesis, they are never going to get anywhere ..." Like, it took human beings however long to figure out that trees were making wood out of

carbon dioxide. Like, that's a crazy concept. There would be things [students] would never discover. (JG)

For me, Jeff's final point highlights the tensions that exists in education between academic structure and freedom. His comment about kids having to "invent photosynthesis" beautifully illustrates the necessary balance a teacher must seek out between the organization and delivery of curriculum and the self-guided and playful methods a learner might pursue to meet them. However, as is evidenced in the following section, educators at BMC may have represented the "pure constructivist" style that Jeff Goodman and I discussed.

In summarizing his thoughts on the ideal spirit of his classroom, Jeff Goodman shared his desire to cultivate experiences that bring people together, that get people moving physically, and that get people thinking about their personal values and perspectives in relationship to course content and the perspectives of others:

[Jeff] I would hope that my class feels like we are playing. I would hope that my class feels like we are getting to talk to one another. I would hope that my class, my classes, feel like places where people want to try something beyond what I'm asking. Or, you know, like if I set a little problem they'd think of something that is two steps away but that it feeds back to the central idea.

[John] Or two steps closer to their own experience.

[Jeff] Exactly. Exactly! And, I would hope that my classes are places where people feel safe and they enjoy the company of the other people--places where people feel seen, by me and by other people. Places where people's bodies seem appreciated. You know, places where people's innate curiosity is respected. (JG)

Jeff's comments seem to reflect his broader desire to cultivate experiences in the classroom that make students want to engage: with course content, with one another, and with the place where the learning is taking place.

Make all the Mistakes First

In Martin Duberman's (1972/2009) book *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community*, transcripts from BMC faculty meetings are included to shed insight into the processes and underlying philosophical principles that drove operations. In the following BMC faculty meeting transcript from Duberman's book, Josef Albers and colleagues discuss "what teaching is" and the best ways to learn something, and the greater purpose of education. For me, the comments by Josef Albers encapsulate my understanding of the spirit of education at BMC:

ALBERS: When I came to this country, I found that you had one general term which included the instruction part of teaching and the purely educational part, which means the development of will. We have two words: one for the real giving of methods or facts (information), and another for the development of character. I do not know whether the English language has words for these two things. These two things have, in this school, definite weights. I think the main weight should go on the part which means educating the will and character.

RICE: May I say, to clear this, that "instruction" and "education" are words meaning these two types of education... This distinction has been lost in America in the universities and colleges... if you were choosing a faculty for a college like this, you would be disinclined to put in a teacher whose chief job was the transmitting of technique. If we could, would we have a professor of carpentry? Carpentry is a technique, and education in Mr. Albers's sense would have little chance of it.

ALBERS: I would like to have professors of carpentry, but I would say "let the freshman make all the mistakes and then let the professor show him how to do it..." Give them freedom first. The instructor is necessary later (for example in medicine), for you have to have the facts later but not in the beginning.
(p. 101)

I never cease to find inspiration in the words of Josef Albers. In this passage, he shares his belief that only once learners have grappled—unaided—with the challenges of a given topic, are they in a place in their hearts and minds to receive instruction.

Albers’ also stressed the important connections that exist between experiential learning and the development of morality. As this BMC faculty transcript continues, Joe Martin asks Josef Albers to draw a distinction between education for ethical development, and education for knowledge:

JOE MARTIN: Don’t we have to distinguish between the function of the college and that of the professional school? The man who goes to graduate school... goes knowing what he is interested in and he goes for information. He does not go for personal development, but to acquire technical skill...

ALBERS: Let us take a dentist school—a real professional school. You cannot stop personal development in a dentist school... I would like a dentist to learn about decency... I think it would be better for every school if the development of character was considered also. Every school should include what we call at Black Mountain “education.” (p. 101)

In his response, Albers noted that “decency” should be present in all levels of education, thereby illuminating the spirit of education present throughout BMC curriculum. Education at BMC served to cultivate compassion and enrich the soul, not just to produce masters or experts in a given field of study.

Starring on Broadway

Jeff and I also discussed the performative nature of teaching, and the ways that repetition over multiple “shows” has enabled him to refine and improve his teaching practice. I asked him if he ever became bored or worried about burning out by doing the same lesson

over and over. He explained to me that he felt his teaching was like a “performance” in that he tweaked and refined small elements of his delivery over time:

Well, I’ve thought about this a lot recently. Because I do a lot of things that are very similar semester after semester. But, it’s a little bit like the person who is an actor on Broadway and he does the show 8 times a week and they have to bring something to it, and there are little nuances and whatever. There is something beautiful in trying something again and again, and just modifying it slightly, little changes, trying to take close note to what is changing. I mean. . . even though I know I do [the same activity] a number of times. It’s always a little different. . . I try some new ways of doing it. And I think, “as long as I can keep it alive, for me, and keep my attention.” I do these science shows... for school groups and I do basically a lot of the same experiments, year after year, because they are the ones that students love. (JG)

Jeff’s emphasis on wanting to focus on elements of science that students “love,” aligns beautifully with Joseph Bathanti’s comment, from Chapter 4, which references a Vera Williams quote, that “without love, there is no education” (Joseph Bathanti, personal communication, November 18th, 2018).

In describing himself as an “Enthusiasm Engineer,” Jeff emphasized his underlying desire to increase engagement and student-presence and to make all education an experience. He was also quick to point out that the changes he makes in his teaching based on yesterday’s “performance” are neither self-indulgent nor sweeping, but rather are incremental ways by which to strike a balance between engagement and entertainment:

I’m not going to just do something that doesn’t work because it needs to be new. But, there are these little tiny changes, and then I can start to focus on, like: hmmm. . . how do I call a kid up? And how do I choose which kid? And start to pay attention to those things. And, oh, I got a really good laugh on that last time, but... can I still get the laugh, but change how I am presenting it so the idea is clearer? Like these little micro adjustments. And that’s where I really get all my interest. And also I think, frankly, why I get better at it. Because I’ve done things, I’ve tried little iterations of things over and over. (JG)

These comments shed insight into the ways Jeff attempts to refine each teaching performance, through small adjustments, as a means of designing more effective and engaging learning experiences. By making “little tiny” changes to his teaching over time, he is able to improve his practice while also maintaining the consistent approaches that have proven effective in his courses over time.

Sharing similar reflections on her teaching, Christina Sornito explained to me that she developed an awareness of the “performative” nature of teaching in the early days of her teaching career when she was an adjunct. When I asked her to share her first impressions of teaching, she described coming to an understanding that our engagement in educational experiences is contextualized against our cultural of entertainment media, and how teaching and learning exist as one-part performance mixed with one-part content:

I adjuncted for a year, and I taught a 1-2, and I led field schools as well. Each time I began to accumulate strategies. . . and I also accumulated for myself, a sense of how I might comport myself in the classroom. Which changed over time, I realized that I needed to change and I would actually do things like think of myself as a standup comedian or actor who needed to be aware of: my delivery, my cadence, how I began a class, how I ended a class. I began to see the whole thing as a kind of performance and it was at that point that I realized that things oddly came into focus. And so it’s much about the intellectual ideas... but what really over time has emerged for me, is, thinking about how one’s performativity of content delivery is really key. So I’ve even said [that] in grad school, doing an improv class should be required. (CS)

Christina’s comments about the theatrical aspects of teaching align perfectly with the educational philosophy of BMC. More than just placing the arts at the center of the educational experience for learners, her comments suggest that teachers too must learn to leverage creative and dynamic practices to further engage learners.

These excerpts from conversations with Jeff and Christina demonstrate the ways in which teachers described and perceived experiential education through performative teaching processes. Although many of my conversations with Faculty Fellows and coordinators of the BMCS related to the ways in which they tried to cultivate active and experiential processes in the classroom, some also described the ways in which they foster real-world learning opportunities that extend beyond the walls of the classroom.

The Professional Academic & Academic Professional

I began my conversation with Jason Miller by asking him about his path into the profession of teaching. He shared with me that he grew up in Boone, North Carolina, but moved away to pursue his education and a career in architecture. He explained that he was working in New York right as the recession hit in 2008, which prompted him to move back to Boone where he was able to find work in teaching as an adjunct at Appalachian State University, later finding regional work as an architect. This story led us to discuss his desire to find a balance in his career between working as a professional in the field of architecture, and as an associate professor the department of Sustainable Technology. He described how he was able to blend his work as an architect with his emerging career as a teacher:

[Jason] So, that's the long version of how I got into teaching. [I] grew up here, went away from here, got 'Boone-er-anged' Back to here.

[John] I love that term.

[Jason] And started teaching at the University. And so the moment that synthesis of seeing both sides of the conversation, and being able to marry my consistent academic interests with my professional practice was really what brought me to teaching." (JM)

I told him that I felt that he represented the University's ideal faculty member for that position, in that he possessed current professional knowledge and brought authentic and real world learning experiences to his students. In hearing his comments, I asked him if he ever worried that such a double career might stretch him too thin:

[John] It's almost unrealistic, if I may say so.... Can you have a full-time, all the time experience in the field, while also bringing that daily to the classroom?

[Jason] Well it is a question of sustainability, certainly, and it has not been without its challenges. What I have found as I move from a lecture position to . . . [tenure track], I decided to make a stronger commitment to the academic side, and I incorporated myself and my professional practice, creatively named: David Jason Miller Architect PLLC. That 1 man shop allows me to maintain professional currency and decide projects that I want to work on or firms that I want to collaborate with. So I do a lot of that collaborative and consultant work professionally, which keeps the overhead down and keeps my need to try to grow the practice down, so that I can focus on the academic job. But I've found, [a] kind of currency in applied learning and project based learning. And pursuing with students what are essentially professional projects. (JM)

I noted that he described maintaining an architectural license as "professional currency" in that it allows him to leverage his professional business as a pedagogical tool.

Speaking to the tensions he experiences between structure and freedom in education, Jason Miller explained that he designs his courses to feel like a synthesis and blend of professional and academic spaces. He explained that he strives to offer students an opportunity to work on professional projects that are grounded in both process and product. By providing students with a chance to work on real jobsites as a component of their undergraduate coursework, Jason told me he feels he is able to enact authentic processes of experiential learning that benefit not only the student, but also the teacher, the educational

institution, and community partners. He described how, from a business perspective, such a model actually serves as good public relations for all parties involved:

Well, having the students involved, opens doors for them to actually get the project. Because it's a much better story [and] it's great PR for them, so ultimately it's a great economic tool as well as a great educational tool. And it allows us to leverage our environmentally and socially centric educational model [to answer]: How do we design, construct, and perform buildings responsibly today for our students? Allows us to push all legs of the sustainability stool, versus just one (JM)

Jason's comments not only speak to the uniqueness of his brand of project-based learning, but also suggest a broader understanding and appreciation for how universities might further progress mission statements of diversity and sustainability through project and service-based learning. He told me the educational experiences he designs not only model sustainable and responsible business practices for students, but also enable Appalachian State University to foster—and boast about—its sustainable ethic within nearby communities.

He went on to discuss how the educational practices that he and his colleagues have implemented have produced award-winning products of learning. He explained that he and his students, “competed a house on the National Mall [in Washington D.C.] against all these other university teams and found that our Building Science program and our Sustainable Technology program could stand up to national research institutions with schools of architecture, colleges of engineering, and construction management and perform really well” (JM). He then described how “professional experience” in academic spaces challenges students to engage authentically with curriculum, where failure is a natural part of the process:

And what we found was a transformative experience for our students. And what architects like Chad and myself found was we found professional work, in the academic environment. And we found academic research in professional practice. . . so again marrying those two fields. . . those have been the legacy of, we—as some “Professional Academics” and “Academic Professionals”—have tried to find a way to marry our own interests in the classroom to match our professional goals. Well, we have tried to bring that professional experience. Treat the classroom like an office, versus treating it as an exercise in esoteric, traditional knowledge transfer. Learn by doing, learn by failing. And try to screw up a little bit less next time. And that’s kind of the ethos of, not just my work in this program, but most of our faculty. (JM)

Resentment towards what he perceives to be ineffective modes of education—based solely in knowledge transfer and Freire’s (1970/2003) banking model of education—can be heard in Jason Miller’s comments. He believes that experiential and project-based learning is essential to learning. Further, he explained to me that the value increases even more when the work of students benefits local communities and social groups.

I also noted—and appreciated—his use of the word “failure,” which he stated was an essential ingredient in education. Similar to the educational philosophy at BMC, Jason’s comments suggest that students in his courses are encouraged to take risks and make mistakes. With risk taking, students learn to use their imagination and creativity to envision unique approaches to course assignments. When embracing failure, students are in dialogue with their personal process as a creator, and learn how to refine and improve their practice.

To me, the strategy used by Jason and his colleague demonstrated not only his desire to provide students with an experience that is authentic to their future professional environment, but also one that nurtures their need to grow and thrive within a professional

craft. Further, his brand of experiential learning through professional projects serves as an effort to fulfill and enrich students and faculty alike.

A Semester Without Grades

Faculty Fellows frequently expressed wonder at the absence of grades and grading at BMC, and described how such an educational model likely served to solidify the academic freedom for which the College was known. Jason Miller told me about the ways the learning experiences that he and his students set up—collaboratively—during the BMCS was informed by their exploration of the history of the BMC. In this excerpt from our conversation, he shared his distaste for grading, and explained how that aversion spurred on the design of his BMCS course:

So as I mentioned the grading process is something I find increasingly miserable, because I think we have conditioned ourselves, culturally, to account for points. And then we do it in the education system and it accounts for everything. Right? Bean counting as a faculty member, doing this for tenure. It all comes back to “did I get a 95 or an 85 on this test when I was in 8th grade?” And our students still think of those point-based systems. So, last semester with the Black Mountain College students, we had a conversation about how BMC worked. So we tried to create, in our studio space, that same environment, of what it must have felt like to be in a BMC course... on Lake Eden. And in this conversation, we learned—and through their research they uncovered—they didn’t go to class. They were set to do these things and they would come back and report... There were never any grades it was were you successful or not. (JM)

Jason’s comments illuminate how, for educators, the process of grading can be tedious at best and misguided at worst. I feel his sentiments reflect a broader feeling that, as a culture, we tend to place more value on the end result than on the process that got us there.

As we continued talking about his Black Mountain Semester, he described how he worked with students to identify the best way to prioritize evaluation over grading, and the best ways to setup the structure of the course. He discussed the ways students' dispositions changed from caring solely about the grade they received, to feeling liberated and focusing instead on processes of design and creation:

And so I took a closed student poll and survey and we decided not to issue any grades during the semester. Until the end of the semester when I gave them a performance review, basically a SWAT analysis of their work in the studio. Not on individual scopes of work, but on everything they had done. As a general idea, they embraced that. Probably because they were like, "oh great, we're all going to get A's! Because how do you grade us without that?" But then we sat down and I asked them before our end of semester meetings, to complete their own individual SWAT analysis and give themselves grades... almost invariably their letter grades were lower than what I ended up giving them. And because of that reflective exercise, I found that I had given them agency in their education. And they were no longer afraid of what they were doing, they were more interested in how they were doing it, and what they could do. So that was a really important thing for me, to learn about student agency in contemporary education. (JM)

As a result of the removal of the traditional grading structure from his BMCS course, Jason explained that students became driven by curricular concepts, rather than being overly concerned with their academic performance. He continued by telling me about the affirming responses he received from his students after the conclusion of the semester:

I got emails after the studio was over, [after] I had long since done their evaluations... saying, "I wish I could go back to that evaluation now, where we talked about grading, because that was the most amazing... Those interviews at the end of the semester... demonstrated that you had really thought about me as an individual, and what I was interested in, and what I was motivated by. (JM)

Through stories of the emails he had received from students, Jason was able to express to me the ways the experiences he facilitated in his courses were unique and atypical of the

student's average experience in higher education. Further, his comments underscored how a student centered approach to experiential learning can impact and influence learners in a way that other models of education cannot.

He went on to share with me how has carried forward the practices he developed during the BMCS into the classes he is teaching now:

So that was really impactful, and so this semester, as a legacy of that, while I've returned to a more grading rubric established set for the studio course I'm teaching, I had the students generate their own contract their declaration of operation for this studio course. What kind of a culture they wanted to cultivate. So, they created deadlines. If, the night before a project is due, pencils are down at 11pm. There's no more work allowed, so that they can be rested for a review. All-nighters are at their discretion otherwise. . . It goes down to music in the studio, it goes down to specifying how they will interact with one another. And the kind of language they will use. And it is a 3 page contract that we created and are following along with, and I am subject to the same tenants. It levels the playing field. (JM)

Jason's comments point to the value of educational experiences where the prominence of grades and grading is diminished. By sharing that students reached out to express their appreciation after the conclusion of the course, Jason Miller underscored both the importance and the rarity of this educational approach otherwise in his students experiences in higher education.

You Live and Die Every Day

To begin my conversation with Joseph Bathanti, I asked him to tell me about his path towards becoming an educator. He described how, after a stint with the domestic Peace Corps, his desire to do good in the world—through public service—collided with the reality that he needed to find a way to earn a living:

I was faced with uh, “I need a job. What am I going to do?” And I had always thought that my college teachers were kind of cool, and that that was a sort of romantic way to make a living. In some ways—you know, from my perspective anyhow—I had no idea what they really did. Like I had no idea what anybody really did. But I also wanted to be a writer and I had no earthly idea what that meant either. (JB)

These comments point to the inner tension with which we all grapple: the desire to have an inspiring and meaningful career balanced against the need to provide ourselves, and our dependents, with food and shelter. Joseph continued by telling me about the unconventional manner in which he applied for his first teaching position:

So I marched into Central Piedmont Community College. The way you would march onto a construction site to find a foreman—because I didn’t know how you did that. I just had no idea. So I walked in to the chair’s office and said, “How ya doin’? Do you need anybody to teach for you?” as if that’s the way you do it. And he’s been a friend ever since. He actually coached me as to how you go about those things. You make phone calls, you write letters of applications, you have a resume, you setup an appointment. And then the next day he hired me, actually. (JB)

I noted that Joseph’s story illuminated a unique entry point to becoming a teacher. As we continued talking, he told me about the challenges he faced in his first days of teaching and the overall “nurturing” and “nourish[ment]” he receives from this profession:

So, that was in March of 1977 I began teaching. Having no earthly idea what that meant. How to do it. I remember my first class was a three hour class and I exhausted, after 7 minutes, every single bit of intelligence that I owned, and thought, “oh... uh oh, I’m in the wrong... I’m in the wrong business, I’ll never be able to do this.” But, little by little—as you know—you get—as I like to say—less bad, rather than better. You get a little bit less bad and a little less bad. And now I cannot imagine another place on earth for this particular chap to make a living. It’s just been, you know, a pretty nurturing, and nourishing, and fabulous way to make a living. Being around all of these terrific students and colleagues like yourselves. And, I don’t know, I mean it’s a highly civilized way to make a living. (JB)

Joseph's comments portray the profession of teaching as an art form and a craft that must be refined and perfected over time. Like many other participants I spoke with, he described the enjoyment and enrichment that he receives from the field of teaching. He continued by describing the ways that teachers can feel a sense of "guilt" regarding how well they perform their duties as an educator:

And, sometimes um, you are even under the impression that you are making a difference in people's lives. Which is, but, that is... that is the guilt part too. "Did I teach well today? Did I do my job? Am I working hard enough?" Because it becomes, you know, like a vocation, like a priesthood. You know, it's a little like social work. You know, and I don't mean that in any derogative way. But, you know, there's a pretty... the bar is high. The responsibility is enormous, but, I guess I love it. I mean, I guess I love it. I can't imagine. (JB)

As a teacher and researcher studying education, I was curious to learn Joseph's thoughts on classroom engagement. I shared that while my deepest desire may be to make a difference in people's lives, I often struggle to feel good about my teaching because I found it hard to gauge a student's emotional response to the educational experience:

[Joseph] Well yeah, I mean you live and die every day, you know. I mean you really do. In that sense, it's like playing ball too. You have a good game, or you don't have a good game. Although, it's a little more difficult to measure, because [teachers ask themselves], "when does the yield come? When will you find out?"

[John] If you lose the game, but had a good time, in a baseball game, you don't necessarily go home being like, "well, I smiled the whole time." You would be kind of bummed.

[Joseph] Right. Right.

[John] But maybe there is a spirit of that?

[Joseph] Right. And a lot of education is time released. You know. It doesn't maybe take that day, or that year, or maybe two years later something you did or said in a classroom that people have been marinating over that the whole time, and just wondering. Or, it's been marinating in them, or however I'm supposed to use the verb. (JB)

Joseph's comments about the "time released" nature of education suggested to me that he was not focused on, or driven by, the production of exemplary works by students during their time in his class. Instead, he seemed to want to position students to experience growth in their writing through guided practice.

Fail, Fail Again, Fail Better

Given his emphasis on experience over results, I asked Joseph about the role of assessment in his courses. He responded by underscoring his belief that education is a process-driven, rather than product-driven pursuit. He then described the important role failure plays within his classes:

[John] There's also the dreaded transactional nature of education too. Where it's like, "what do I need to do to get that grade?"

[Joseph] Well that's the problem.

[John] And then move on.

[Joseph] That's what I hate. . . And I don't know what other teachers say, but of course evaluating is my least favorite part of it. One of the reason that I like Black Mountain so much is, you know there were no grades. You know, wouldn't it be heavenly to never have to grade your students. (JB)

Although I agreed with the notion that not having to grade student work would make my job easier, I also wanted to ask him for more information about the nature of grading at BMC. I told him that I was under the impression that grades were documented, and records were

kept, but that they were not shown to students as to not influence their experience as learners. He confirmed that I was correct in that impression and went on to describe how part of the appeal of BMC was that they embraced failure as a part of learning:

Yeah, I mean [BMC teachers and students] were concentrating on process not product, which is the way I like to run my class. You know. That everything is a draft, everything is a process. You know, “Fail, fail again, fail better” as Samuel Becket said. (JB)

In conjuring these iconic remarks by Samuel Becket (2012) related to failure as a path towards success and truth, Joseph illuminated how taking risks in the classroom is an integral part of the educational experience. He went on to describe how he encourages students to share works that are less than perfect, because these are the places where they are most likely to experience growth, now and in their future endeavors.

[John] Enjoy failure!

[Joseph] Yeah! I mean, take a crack. You know what you can do well, why keep doing that over and over again. You know I teach.... You know I teach writing workshops—poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction—and I always urge the students to bring in stuff that they are *not* [his emphasis] sure of. Stuff that they *don't* like. Because, if they are just using the workshop to showcase how fabulous they are, [then] they are wasting their time. Because they have this valuable opportunity to bring in their work in front of 15 discerning readers, who have read that work, and care about that work, and they can say: “I was stymied by your ending” or “I thought that you were too repetitive” or “we need a better sense of place” or “all of your characters dialogue sound the same.” You know so. So I’m interested in that idea of process and failure and drafts and redrafts, and never, kind of never being finished in a way. You know. Although that’s, [chuckling] that’s not what students want to hear. Because, as young as they are, they are in this big hurry to get out there. And do whatever it is. And when you are faced with being out there. They are anxious about being out there. (JB)

Joseph feels his classroom is a place where students can refine and improve their craft through critique and inspiration from peers. He shared his understanding that his class is but one brush stroke in the larger picture of a student's life and that embracing failure positions students to better appreciate process in their education. As we continued talking, I shared how I sympathized with students who feel in a rush to *get out there*:

[John] But, it's apprehension, of what you think you should be doing, but it's never like, "I need to go and do that thing I want to be doing." It's "I need to go and tow the line, and do what people expect of me." You know. "And get that degree as quickly as possible.

[Joseph] Yeah, and because I teach creative writing, measurement is deadly. You know. Because I'm seen as a so-called "expert," of course. Who can levy a fixed judgement on a piece of work that some 19 year old has written, and... They're not supposed to be that good just yet. But if I give them a C or a D, and they decide that they will never write again. Because I have "evaluated" them, and I have decided they're no good. You know, writing is something that you get better at as you get older. So the person I would knock out of the competition, because I give him or her a bad grade, might in three years become the next, who knows. . . I don't know, Sylvia Plath.

In describing the challenges he faces with assessment and evaluation in creative writing classes, Joseph describes his desire to motivate students to keep trying, practicing, and growing in their craft. His comments suggest that grades and the act of grading, more often than not, have the unintended consequence of shutting students down, rather than inspiring their continued diligence. He continued by explaining that students would get better at their craft overtime and therefore his role as a teacher was assess their process, rather than their product:

And I want to keep them in the game. You know. I don't want them running out of it deciding that they are no good because they haven't been on the planet long enough

to know if they are good enough. And also they haven't worked hard enough to know if they are good enough, They haven't practiced hard enough, so part of my job is to instill them with a daily practice. If you really want to be a writer. This is what you. This is what you have to do. (JB)

In describing his trepidation towards assessment, Joseph further emphasized the spirit of his classroom as a place of embracing imperfection through process and “daily practice.” Often higher education is perceived as a place where students should be consistently producing exemplary work, yet such a perspective doesn't take into account that even the most outstanding students have room to improve. In this way, the spirit of Joseph's class might also be that of incompleteness and imperfection—of humility that leads to gratitude and growth.

Students—and parents—want *Thingness*

He concluded his thoughts on the value of process-based education by describing the ways that education without a tangible product at the end can be “hard to sell” to students and their families:

[Joseph] So, you know, I am just really interested in process. The product just does not interest me as much. But, again, that is a hard sell, because people want to produce. They want to have something, they want “thingness” they don't want ephemera. And they have parents! And they are paying tuition.

[John] What have you got to show for yourself?

[Joseph] Yeah, exactly. Yeah, you have to make a living. I mean you really do have to make a living.

Joseph's comment illuminates the tension that several of the Faculty Fellows and coordinators spoke of between academic structure, filled with assessment and top-down

accountability, and academic freedom that is fueled by a student's motivation and interests. Yet, amidst their concern, many participants also shared the opinion that feedback is important in the learning process.

I noted the way his comments seem to reflect a belief that many of the most important aspects of education are intangible. Perhaps more importantly, such intangibility draws criticism from students who want to feel successful, and from family members who want to see results. To me, I perceived his words as a cautionary tale and a warning of how traditional expectations, regarding what education is supposed to be, can get in the way of *actual* learning. I marveled at the poetic-yet-simple way he pointed to student's—and their parent's—desire for “thingness” as a factor he must negotiate in his teaching practice. For me, Joseph's comments reinforce the structural and societal challenges inherent in cultivating process-based and experiential learning. Perhaps a learner's struggle to let go of the product, and focus on the process, is the greatest challenge facing education today. Further, if the structure of the educational institution appears to place more value on product—in the form of test scores and grades—than the experience itself, learners will become conditioned to only value these tangible results.

That's a B Leap

Ray Miller also expressed to me his desire to assess student process over product. After discussing the ways in which he designs his course curriculum out of student generated questions, he explained to me that traditional forms of assessment are ineffective for grading creative work, and argued they instead diminish the quality of the educational experience. He

then described the ways in which evaluation and feedback play an affirmative role in helping his students refine and continue to pursue their practice and craft:

We don't do evaluations in the studio. We don't say, "woah that's an A double tour! Good for you. Wow, that's a B leap." What the hell's that all about? You don't finish a scene in which a student has just gotten done pouring their heart into a character and say, "wow, that was a C performance kid." No! We interrogate: "who's the character? What are you trying to do? What are you bringing to the character? What's not there? What can you do next?" Okay. So one of the things I'm struggling with right now is that notion of, what is the connection between evaluation, which students want, and grading, which students don't want. (RM)

Ray Miller's comments underscore his focus on cultivating assessment strategies that help students refine and improve their craft. His distinction between "evaluation" and "grading" suggests that the act of quantifying a grade for student work close learning experiences down, rather than opening them up.

As we continued talking about the role of assessment in education, I shared my belief that many students seem to be more motivated by grades than they are by learning. Our dialogue about grading and evaluation brought us to a conversation on how to best create educational experiences that have a lasting impact:

[John] But, at the same time, they want the A. Which is not the same thing?

[Ray] They want the A which is not the same thing as [evaluation]. Meaning, "That was a pretty good performance John, but you know what, I think if you put a little bit more time in your voice, boy that song could really go." And you go, "Great, thanks a lot professor Ray, let me go work on that." And I come back and I do it and I earn the A because I sang the song better. So, one of the things I've been thinking about is the notion of—which I don't think is a new idea—you give students opportunities to redo work, to earn the higher grade that they want. But they've *earned* it! They've earned it. So I've been playing around with different techniques by which to do that. (RM)

Ray's comments point to the notion that there is not only a distinction between grading and evaluation, but that students can inform and enhance their practice as a result of revisions grounded in feedback, evaluation, and dialogue.

Some Teachers Want *Thingness*

Speaking to the persisting nature of the teacher-as-authority in higher education, James Toub cautioned that some teachers still stress the importance of “thingness” and creating a final product that meets their expectations:

And we have lots of different teachers here and some teachers do project that idea, that they have a sense of what they want and the student tries to give them that. What's most important for many students—probably most—is getting the A, getting the good grade. The grade is the measure of success, and in many ways the grade should be irrelevant. But they have been groomed, they have been trained, from a very early age, to measure their success by the grade that they get. And the teacher has the authority to give the grade, so you do what? You get ingrained in you. You internalize this idea that if you want the good grade that you need to do what the teacher tells you to. (JT)

James' comments shed insight into a culture in higher education where the organization's desire for what Joseph Bathanti described as “thingness” begins to impact the habits and mentalities of faculty. He went on to explain how he strives to dispel what he feels are educational myths with his students from the beginning:

[James] And so I come in and try to say, “it's not about me” and there is no right answer. And your success in this class will be dependent on your capacity to make an argument for your point of view. The degree to which you can effectively argue, with evidence, to support your particular point of view, will be the degree to which you succeed or fail in this class. [laughter]” He said.

[John] That's beautiful. I think that's positively marvelous. I mean that speaks to the essence of meeting them where they are, in a way.

[James] Yes! Exactly.

[John] Because you are saying, “here’s what I want. I want you to believe in yourself!”

[James] Yes, that’s right. Exactly! Finding your own voice, is what I say. Or, To use the language of Kokoschka, find your own vision. You know, vision for the visual artist is equal, is tantamount to voice. And so, “who are you? What do you want to say? What do you want to know, that will help you say what you want to say? And, what can I do to help you do that? To help you get there? So, I become a kind of facilitator or guide: or antagonist or protagonist. That can help you along the journey to find yourself.

[John] Your classes must be a lot of fun. That sounds marvelous!

[James] [laughs harder]. Well some people can’t stand that. [laughs harder still] They hate me for it. (JT)

As James and I discussed the relationships between knowledge and learning, I noted that his emphasis on students’ application of knowledge using their personal backgrounds, experiences, and skillsets was directly in line with the educational philosophy of BMC. Within such a progressive and experiential educational philosophy, learning becomes an organic process where the contributions of unique ideas, perspectives, and approaches are a key component of shared problems they seek to solve.

What Students *Will* Remember

Ray Miller described the impact working with Dee Fink (2013) has had on his thinking and practice related to curriculum design:

I took a work shop with [Dee Fink]... [and] one of the things that he kind of startled us out of the box was, he said “you know, if a student goes to school and takes 5 classes per semester—and let’s assume he’s in for four years—he’s going to have 40 courses. So when the kid leaves here four or five years from now, what’s the one thing when they think about Ray Miller’s dance history class?” Boom!... “What’s the

one thing that's really going to matter to that kid's life? Okay." So, he tries to get us to think in terms of, what is the one, two, or at most, three things that you think are vital. And you start with that vitality. And then you work backwards in terms of structuring what that course is going to be. So that by the end, it's not just that they remember, it's that they care about the doggone thing. (RM)

Ray learned strategies for effective curriculum design when taking a workshop with Dee Fink about the principles in his (2013) book *Creating Significant Learning Experiences*: where educators are encouraged to design their courses in terms of a minimal number of primary objectives, and then work backwards in planning their curriculum. His comment that he wants students to care about their education, and take away a few things that leave a lasting impression, stood out to me as a simple, yet powerful, way to design curriculum throughout a course. His comments highlight a belief that students should not be afraid of receiving criticism, and that assessment should be a tool that is useful to students for improving their technique and their approach to future work. His comments suggest a desire to create learning experiences that simplify and amplify the most important messages of the curriculum. To me, his use of the word "vitality" points to the ways that education can become compromised when it loses meaning and value to students. By striving to get students to "care" about an area of study, Ray is not only demonstrating his desire to make the curriculum memorable for years to come, he is also demonstrating his dedication to cultivating educational experiences of value in the moment and during the learning process.

Ray shared with me that his overarching objective was to make his curriculum relevant and valuable to the lives of his students:

Yeah, so that of course is something that I'm trying to bring into the classroom. Which particularly for me, history is a verb, not a noun. For many of my students, it's a noun, past tense. I'm trying to think in terms of how do I, if you are 19, think about history as, an interrogation of questions that matter now. How do we do that? (RM)

His comments suggest that education tends to be impersonal and disconnected from the lives and experiences of learners. Throughout our conversation, I noted the ways that he seemed to strive to change this dynamic by personally getting to know the student he works with, and then using that information to create learning experiences that are more likely to be meaningful to each student individually.

Trying on Personas and Taking Risks as a Teacher

Ray and I next discussed his process of growth in becoming the teacher he is today. He recalled how his early days of teaching represented a period of emulation and mimicking of his mentors. He described finding his inspiration today through getting to know the individual students in his classes, and helping them kindle an intrinsic passion for learning:

[John] Can you tell me a bit about your early days of teaching. What were your first experiences like?

[Ray] I had... more than a couple of really good teachers. So I think that in the first couple of years, I was putting on the persona of those teachers and trying to be them—with my body and my voice. And... that was okay, but obviously at some point you go, [blowing sound] “wait, that’s really Allan Johnson doing that, but that’s not *me* doing that.” So I think by the time I got into my late 20s early 30s, I started to become more comfortable with me. (RM)

I noted the ways in which Ray’s comments made me think of ways I have emulated teachers whom I knew and admired over the course of my teaching career. Through emulation, we try on the educational personas of our predecessors and mentors in an effort to find our own

identity. I appreciated the ways he related “putting on the persona[s]” of his mentors as a path towards discovering his own unique talents as an educator. He went on to describe what his teaching practice looks like today, and the elements that now enable him to take risks in his teaching:

So now . . . it’s about my having a relationship with *you*, the student, in terms of where we are in this particular moment in time. Now [you identify] the fire in between that... Then you kind of invite students in to get closer to the fire... and your job is to try and get close to them and encourage them to get close to the fire and respond to the fire. I didn’t get the kind of freedom to do that until I was in my early thirties. And it started not in the classroom, but in the directing of plays and the choreographing of dances, in which you are not worrying about, “is that on the test? What’s the grade?” Da da da. It’s about, “everybody come together around something exciting and let’s all make it better.” Then, trying in my 40s to go, “woah, wait a minute, the classroom should not be so antiseptic.. So how do we bring that into there?” So it took until midlife to start to give myself that freedom. But also, [whispers] also I was tenured. (RM)

In these comments Ray emphasized how his collective experiences—as a student and as an educator—have aided him in identifying ways to cultivate engagement in the classroom. His comment that education “should not be so antiseptic” struck me as an affirmation of both his student centered approach to curriculum design as well as his thoughts on the value of experiential learning broadly. In his final comment in this part of our conversation, he also suggested that being tenured gave him a sense of autonomy and creative license, thereby serving as an invitation to take risks in his teaching.

Reflecting on the overall experience of teaching his BMCS class, Joseph Bathanti described the many unique experiences this campus-wide event brought to his students. He explained that, in addition to the meaning students likely derived from the experience, the

BMCS also reinforced in him the value of taking “chances” as an educator in order to provide students with the best possible learning experience:

I think their lives are forever informed. You know it would be so hubristic of me to say “changed,” because of the class. I think they were really changed, but I think they were [also] influenced in extraordinary ways. And maybe resuscitated in them—and in me—the belief that education can really matter beyond getting a degree. And just developing an acumen in a particular strand of knowledge. (JB)

Joseph’s comments suggest that education may not always matter, or provide value, to students other than simply “getting a degree,” but that the BMCS perhaps offered him and his students to challenge this perception and stereotype. He went on to describe the uniqueness of the BMCS as a learning context, as students were not only able to interact with some of the iconic places and people they were studying, but as a result they became scholars of BMC and were “among a cherished few who knew a heck of a lot” about the College and its legacy. He went on to explain the impact such an experience likely had on these students beyond this one class:’

So I think that made them feel good about, about a number of things about themselves. But also, I think, they were able to take that ethos and practice into other classes. And again, you know, I don’t want to take any credit for it, if it wasn’t for those 11 people, and a dog—one of the students brought her dog to class every day and it was an under-socialized formerly abused rescue animal, Molly, who became a member of the class, and little by little came out of her shell. It was pretty amazing. (JB)

In his comments, I noted the ways that the development of a student’s “ethos” was considered as important as any curriculum related to creative writing practices. Joseph next described the ways that his experience—and security—in the profession of teaching encouraged him to take “chances” in his teaching:

The other thing is, I've been teaching for almost 42 years so I'm willing to take chances now that I feel like I can't—this probably isn't true—but they can't really do anything to me at this point, haha. I'm sure they can, you know. Please don't do anything to me at this point! But I do have a feeling that this is the time to take some cracks at stuff. To experiment, to be willing to fail, you know, I know what I can do well, but some of it is wrote. I just didn't want to just churn out another class. (JB)

With these comments, Joseph expressed his perception of the value of risk taking in teaching, and the ways his practice was inherently connected to his feelings of job security. By feeling secure and stable in his position, he suggests that he was willing to apply the same educational philosophy of risk-taking—that he encourages of his students—towards his own teaching. He concluded by summarizing the ethic of exploration and playful learning that he seeks to bring to his teaching and curriculum design:

And so it's changed me too. I'm trying to bring to my Watauga classes that spirit of experimentation and adventure. Take chances and be willing to fail myself, even though, like most teachers, on days I didn't really think I did a terrific job, I feel kind of miserable and hopeless. I feel like I failed the kids. And the gap between my age and there age and mine, as I teach longer and longer gets bigger and bigger and bigger. So therefore I feel like the responsibility gets bigger and bigger. (JB)

Joseph's comments affirmed in me a belief that education is best when it is constructed in small and personal ways. The style of experiential learning he described emulated the spirit of community that existed nearly one hundred years ago at BMC, where a small group of people came together, living closely with one another, and experienced education on personal and interpersonal levels. Through our conversation, I came to understand that Joseph seemed to want to offer his students a similar experience.

Semester as an Experiment

In my conversation with Jody Servon, she discussed her goal of striking a balance between creating a structure within which students can base their academic works, and providing students with the freedom to explore their own unique take on the creative projects in which they engage.

[John] [Early in your career as an educator] were you ever in a position where you were like, “I have all of this information and I’m looking to give that to you. To transfer it to you.” Or, did you have a different perspective on what your job was in the classroom from the start?

[Jody] I’d say it was more of a hybrid. Since I’ve have had the professional experiences I’m able to share some of those. Like specifically with art management, there’s a skillset that will hopefully help you succeed in a range of different kinds of work that you may do. So there’s that, where “I’ve done these things. I know how this works. Let me share that with you.” But, that would be really boring to just be in that place all the time. So I kind of think that this semester I’ve set it up as an experiment. “So this is our laboratory. And we are going to work through things in ways that may be foreign to you. And sometimes we are going to use devices that are really familiar. Just be open to exploring. (JS)

Jody shared her belief that always teaching from a place of knowledge transfer would be boring and even unproductive. Instead, and similar to BMC, she described the dynamic in her classroom as experimental, where students bring their own unique talents and perceptions to bare on each class activity. As a result, she stated that the atmosphere of her class is much more playful than it would be if it were designed solely for the purposes of knowledge transfer.

Evaluating a Paperclip Self Portrait

Jody went on to describe the ways that she was inspired to create a new grading contract for the class she integrated with the BMCS and how this contract frees her students to focus on process, while also outlining the specific ways in which their work will be assessed:

[Jody] I also use a grade contract—which I started during the Black Mountain College Semester—which has really helped I think free people up from being like, “uh I got a C-.” It’s like “Outstanding, Satisfactory, Not Satisfactory, or No Submission,” is pretty much how everything is graded.” She explained.

[John] Wow. And obviously you’ve got to put a letter in there.

[Jody] At the end, right. So they have an expectation that if you do all of these things you get a B and if you do beyond that you get higher, and if you do less than that... And it changes it in a way that I think is helpful in terms of experimenting. (JS)

In her comments on the role of assessment in teaching and learning, Jody suggested that grading predominantly inhibits students from “experimenting” or taking risks in their own learning process. Instead, she wants students to follow their intuition and interpret assignment descriptions in ways that are divergent, unique to themselves, and that challenge them personally. She went on to provide an example of an open-ended assignment prompt that she might give to students and how her new grading contract positions students to be experimental while still operating within the course structure:

[Jody] You know if I say, make a self-portrait with this paperclip, who’s to say what an A- paperclip self-portrait is, versus a C+ paperclip. But if you are like ‘okay, I am doing what is asked, and I’m getting creative.’ Then it should be satisfactory. Right? And we don’t get rated in that minutia of grades, so just thinking about how to free it up has been really helpful.” She explained.

[John] So what does the grading contract say to students?

[Jody] It says that you have a list of responsibilities, and some of it is participation and treatment of others, and expectations there. But it's like "if you do"—and I can't tell them how many assignments we are going to have for the semester—"you do these, you get satisfactory, and you get the B." So it kind of lays it all out... how you get above that and how you would get below that. What are the things that would drop you down, and what are the things that would lift you up. (JS)

Jody's grading contract positioned students to suspend their anxiety about achieving the highest grade possible and focus exclusively on the process, experience, and task at hand. In this way, her comments were directly in line with the spirit of self-direction and experimentation occurring at BMC. She concluded by describing the values and educational priorities that emerged as a result of her implementation of her new grading contract:

I proposed it during the BMCS because I said, "well think of this as a learning community, where we are here for each other, we are here to support each other, so how can we do that and not be grade centered? Like I understand that you need them for all these kinds of reasons." And I've kind of convinced them... I've done 2 semesters of it so far and I've only seen evaluations from 1, because we haven't gotten our fall semester evaluations yet. To see how students are responding to it. Because it kind of freaks them out at first. (JS)

By designing a grading contract that explicitly spelled out how students can meet or exceed expectations, Jody created a structure that provided her students with guidance while also encouraging creativity and experimentation. In this way, her contract challenged students to take risks and push their own boundaries during the learning process. By directing focus away from grades and grading, Jody's grading contract served to free students from external pressures and encouraged them to focus on creativity and scholarship.

Ask Three Basic Questions

Christina and I continued our conversation by discussing ways to help students feel successful in courses. She shared with me that she occasionally even needs to temper student expectations. In the following excerpt from our conversation, she explains her strategies for assisting students in reading scholarly texts deeply, while also developing an awareness of the broad interconnections between authors and topics across centuries:

And so in that way, I tell them. . . I hope that they don't feel that they are. . . that they need to come in and have everything read and understood. That is definitely not what I am going for, but, I think that after a certain amount of time, after doing this exercise over and over again. Like [asking], "what is the main argument this person putting forth? What context are they writing in? What do they imagine themselves contributing to the larger intellectual discourse." Those 3 basic questions gets them going, and then about ten readings later, they realize. . . that they can cross-reference. . . and once they start to have that kind of broad idea of a conversation, they get really excited. I mean I can't say that all of them do, but it is interesting to see them start to pop, and feel like, "oh I am part of a conversation. I can get it." And it makes them actually hungrier for more, to make more connections. (CS)

Through her three "basic question," Christina Sornito hopes students will become eager to learn more. To me, her thoughts on wanting to position students to be "hungry" for more seems connected to Jeff Goodman's desire to be an "enthusiasm engineer" (JG) and James Toub's wish to cultivate "curiosity" (JT) in his courses. Through these three questions, Christina told me she has been able to anchor student experiences within scholarly readings using a consistent and stable method of analysis.

She went on to describe the encouragement she received from student comments while they were working with these three questions. She explained that, although she wanted to help them feel connected to broader scholarly conversations, she did not want them to feel

pressure to need to feel like experts in the field. Instead, they should focus on the experience of being exposed to new ideas and new ways of thinking:

I don't put pressure on them on the undergraduate level. It's all about exposure to ideas, getting them involved in conversations that they might not necessarily [have] been involved with before. (CS)

Christina's approach to experiential learning illuminates her desire to make critical thinking approachable to all students by keeping the process simple. I noted the ways that her desire to get students "involved in conversations" they may never otherwise have experienced reflected a desire to promote equity through dialogue with scholarly sources.

Begin with Cave Art

Christina described experiential learning as the process through which students begin to see connections across texts and areas of study. When I asked her to describe the impact media and technology have on her courses, she shared with me a story about her *Anthropology of Media* course, and the strategies she employs for helping learners see connections between old and new media forms:

[John] How does media and technology impact your classroom today?

[Christina] in terms of today. I teach the course The Anthropology of Media, so I think about media and technology a lot... I'm not so interested in the question what is innovative, what is new, what is cutting edge. In terms of technology, I'm interested in how the human sensorium, and the experiences of being human, are contextualized within different mediated frameworks. So when I begin a class in media, I start with cave art, and ritual, and they are like, "What? What's going on? I thought this was a class on media?" and I say "yeah, we might get to the Internet, we might not. Mediation is something that can be in pigments as much as it can be in newspaper, as much as it can be memes on the Internet." So again, I don't.... My goals at least are to involve them in a broader conversation, and not just about questions, especially questions dictated by the Internet itself. (CS)

In her comments, she explained that her goal is for students to leave with an understanding that “mediation” exists and can be experienced on cave walls, around campfire circles, and on screens of all sizes in our world today. I felt this comment illuminated her educational philosophy as wanting to help students become aware of connections in scholarly topics and statements across time, from (pre)classic to contemporary. Christina’s comments suggest that by inviting students to explore relationships between communication forms across time, she was positioning them to make their own observations, perceive their own connections, and draw their own conclusions during a learning process.

Cultivating Creativity through Constraints

During my conversation with Jason Miller, we discussed the ways his teaching practice has evolved over time. When I asked him to describe the changes he has implemented in his approach to education, he responded by telling me about his strategies for cultivating creativity and problem solving through purposeful constraints:

“Within those first years, what did a product of learning look like?” I asked.

The tools remain the same, you know. A set of drawings presentation images or renderings, physical models, digital models that explain a design proposal. The tools remain the same, but now what happens is. . . in some ways I’m more prescriptive of the media used now, so that the creativity deployed emerges. So that you say, “I’m going to give you more constraints than I did before.” So the product is, you just deliver that product in a certain way that’s going to be successful. But now, “here are all these constraints” down to a model where, you can only use one material to make it. What do you do to create the differentiation you know you need to explain your design? That starts lifting past applied thinking to synthetic thinking, creative thinking. And we need to be able to work critically, but we also need to be able to bring creativity to it so that the critical thought becomes synthetic thought. (JM)

Jason explained to me that by building constraints into assignments, he feels he is able to better encourage cultivate creativity in his students. His comments suggest that limiting the options within a given task challenged students to find ways to use available resources in the most efficient ways they could imagine. He described how imposing “constraints” not only required students to use their imagination, but that such practices also promote divergent thinking and problem solving skills. Jason explained that such problem solving activities cultivate “synthetic thinking” where learners are asked to solve problem with limited options.

He went on to describe the ways in which he strives to offer students a perspective on the professional field of architecture. Perspectives that he feels weren’t shared during his own architectural education:

As an architect I teach a lot of architecture projects, or design centric projects, but my professional experience taught me to value construction sequence, the relationship of cost and time, and detailing, and all of these things. But that wasn’t something in my own architectural education that I received as a concern. So I’ve actively tried to think of... creating more constraints that aren’t just about creating the most beautiful space, but instead creating a beautiful space that functions, and does so economically and will last. Making all of those pieces requirements, it [challenges] students to push past, let’s say, their own blocks or walls [that may limit] what they’re capable of doing. You know their far more capable than we give them credit for sometimes.
(JM)

By shedding insight into the kind of information and ideas not included in his own education, Jason Miller stated that he is preparing students for the ins and outs of the professional world while also helping them understand that there will be things that they too must learn on the job.

Conclusion

Throughout my conversations with Faculty Fellows and coordinators of the BMCS, and in my review of documents related to the history and legacy of the BMC, the words “experience” and “experiment” were used to describe the relationship occurring between the learner and the curriculum. Educators across these past and present eras of education described their desire to cultivate process-oriented learning experiences that remain memorable and relevant long after the completion of a given course. In some descriptions of experiential learning, learners were positioned to participate in hands on activities requiring physical movement, while in others, students engaged in more theoretical learning processes, where the experience involving bringing personal ideas, perspectives, and creativity to the scholarly conversation at hand.

Key themes from this chapter relate to the specific motivations behind educators’ decisions to foster experiential learning in their courses, as well as pedagogical strategies for cultivating experiential learning across a range of curricular areas. For instance, Faculty Fellows and coordinators of the BMCS described being inspired by the a spirit of risk taking within education at the BMC. Inherently, within educational processes that involve risks, teachers and learners alike must be encouraged to embrace failure as an inevitable and necessary component of learning. Such an embrace of failure was described by participants as a primary motivation towards promoting a learning environment where students produced and revised drafts of work. As such, participants expressed their motivation to foreground *process* as the most important element in education—more important than any product a

student might produce. Josph Albers may have said it best when he stated that students at Black Mountain College were not there to “fill museums” (Albers, 2017). Evaluation therefore, and a student’s success and growth in a given course, is measured by their drive, presence, and growth within a given area, rather than any masterpiece they may produce. Underscoring this point, Joseph Bathanti’s comment that students are not supposed to be “that good yet” demonstrated his desire help students discover their own potential and to understand that learning and mastery of craft is a lifelong process.

While experiential learning was consistently described as a priority and motivation for curriculum design, participants also described the ways that the structures of higher education influenced and even inhibited academic freedom. Although Faculty Fellows and coordinators stated that they were able to enact participatory and process-based learning experiences for their students, they also discussed many factors which inhibited optimal learning and academic freedom. For instance, James Toub argued that some faculty still want their students to produce “the right answer” by conforming to the teacher’s expectation. I noted that his comments were directly in line with bell hooks (1994/2014) who stated that many teachers espouse progressive and critical values from the pulpit at the front of the classroom—a practice silences the voices, experiences, and unique perspectives of students in the room. Ultimately, the findings from this chapter leave me with the impression that teachers wishing to design and enact processes of experiential learning in the 21st Century must strike a balance between the unbridled freedom and autonomy that comes with student

centered education, and the necessary structures and constraints that contemporary higher education imposes on teachers and learners.

Chapter 7: Research Findings

Vignette 4: Context

The BMC was considered an ideal model of progressive education in the early part of the 20th century (Ballard & Bathanti, 2017; Duberman, 1972/2009; Reynolds, 1998).

Although Faculty Fellows and coordinators of the BMCS sought to celebrate the spirit and legacy of BMC in their courses in 2018, the educational experiences in their courses were distinct in a myriad of ways due to the changing nature of social, political, economic, and environmental contexts. In speaking to the ways education can prepare students to face the challenges and opportunities of the world in the 21st Century, Faculty Fellows and coordinators of the BMCS expressed similar sentiments to educators from BMC. Participants consistently described the importance of cultivating independent thinking and problem solving as a means of addressing the context of living and learning in the contemporary world. In this chapter, I curate passages where participants describe how their curriculum and teaching practices are impacted by context. Further, I share excerpts from conversations where participants describe the relationship between education and democracy and how we might best prepare our students to meet the challenges and opportunities of the 21st Century. The findings in this chapter suggest that our current relationship with Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) is impacting our relationship with reality, which in turn must be accounted for in the contemporary classroom.

Learning for the *Long Term*

I asked Jason Miller to tell me about the changes he has noticed in education during his time as a teacher. He responded by describing an evolving population of learners willing to take greater control over—and responsibility for—their learning:

I think, what changes is that our program continues to get bigger. Which means we have a more diverse profile of students and that diversity. . . creates more perspectives in the classroom. Creates, I think, more range in the work, both in terms of the product, but also the process. I believe that has resulted in students... When I first started teaching... There wasn't a lot of vocalization to a faculty member, "I don't really think this is helping me learn." That's not the same thing anymore. In less than 10 years. Now, if a student doesn't think they're learning in the class, they'll tell you. And they will tell you why. Because they have been raised with that sense of agency. (JM)

Jason's comments suggest that the changing nature of education has led him towards a more process-focused style of teaching. By acknowledging and prioritizing the needs and interests of his learners, he expressed the need he felt to design his curriculum in a way that is flexible. He continued by discussing the ways his evolution as an educator has allowed him to focus on long-term outcomes:

[Jason] It helps the long term learning. I think I was really good when I first started teaching at getting short-term learning.

[John] A small bit of information and then maybe a quiz or test to see if they can spit that answer back?

[Jason] Well, and more than just that. Thinking of it as a semester of learning, but that doesn't necessarily commit to *long term* {his emphasis} learning. It doesn't, you know, I was really good because I had strong expectations, and I was rigorous, and I still am those things, but I'm more committed now to saying, 'If you can. If you will ride the wave, in the room, I think you can take something out of here that might not have anything to do with a building, or a construction document, or a specification. Or that energy model. But, it will be something you can use, as a toolbox of skills:

interpersonally, critical thinking, creative thinking. So you can solve whatever problem you go out to solve. And that's, kind of deep learning. And that's a goal. And I certainly can't always hit it with all students. (JM)

Jason's comments suggest an admiration for learners who speak up for their education in an effort to get the most out of their learning experience. His expression of telling students to "ride the wave" of the educational experience suggested that he felt they may gain knowledge and insight that will be applicable to a range of future contexts—even outside of their profession. His comments reflected a desire to make education about more than a specified curricular area and to position students to be problem solvers through active learning scenarios.

Not Your Parent's Education

Commenting on the contrasts between past and present educational contexts, Jason pointed out that students today also seem more empowered to take ownership over the trajectory and quality of their education:

You know, our parent's generation were not really taught to express themselves. They were taught to listen and they were taught to go to work and pay, raise, and support a family. And I think that the increasing diversity of voices through, you know, social media if we want to talk about #metoo if we want to talk about #blacklivesmatter and we want to talk about: just that willingness, societally, to express it, creates those schisms. Big divides that are serious issues. But I think it translates into students being willing to express it. That the educational paradigm isn't the same as our parents, school education process. (JM)

Jason told me that students today approach their education with a different perspective than did the previous generations—and with different needs. His comments about the mentality of "our parent's generation" reminded me about the predominant social conception of the

purposes of education during the era of BMC, where unconventional practices stood in noticeable contrast to more traditional institutions.

In building upon his suggestion that our modern educational context is unique and distinct from “our parents’ generation,” Jason shared the ways he strives to take into account the transforming communication practices of contemporary society and the ways these practices influence teaching and learning. He argued that our changing communication landscape may serve as a call to rethink education to meet the needs of a new paradigm:

[Jason] Everybody talks about it, right, what these little devices do and change and manipulated our approach to interacting in the world. I mean how many people do you meet with regularly that eye contact is a little bit difficult, or expressing themselves in a clear and coherent way verbally, when they can actually write you a really poetic text messages. Right, I mean there’s these huge differences of how we interact, and ultimately.

[John] Poetic leveraging of emojis.

[Jason] Of course! And so education ultimately is interaction, interaction between student and instructor, student to student, and then the expansion of that. The ripple in the pond is, outside of the classroom to the next set of classes. Can they stitch together that their program of study isn’t one class at a time, But it’s all one big book, and these are different chapters, and this is how those chapters fit together. (JM)

Jason’s comments suggest that a student’s use of ICTs must be factored into all educational experiences. He summed up his approach to experiential learning with the word “interaction,” describing his goal of helping students see his course as but one chapter within the larger “book” that is their education. Along with several other Faculty Fellows and coordinators, Jason expressed concern over the unprecedented impact Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are having on education and society in general.

Building upon his philosophy of treating each student “as a class,” he described the ways that better understanding their habits of communication has enabled him to also better appreciate their strengths as communicators, and as learners.

He went on to describe the ways his educational approach shifts the nature and focus of assessment away from outcomes, and towards process, habit, and ultimately towards progression in ability:

But by encouraging exploration in the classroom I think that we can. You may not get the best product now. . . but the process their getting by just having the agency to try and know that, it doesn’t matter if they fail. . . If they over reach, what’s going to happen is not the product they make here, but the product they make as a professional that’s going to be better. That’s going to be the game changer, and that’s actually what matters. So, we have to kind of temper our own expectations in the classroom of what we think is high academic performance. I think we have to say the high academic performance is, how willing they are to invest. And if they invest here and now, and the thing isn’t perfect, it will be perfect later, when they leave. (JM)

Jason’s emphasis on “process” and *long term* thinking—over product and short term thinking—is directly in line with the philosophy that guided the spirit of education at BMC. His comments showcase his dedication and commitment towards an ethic of learning by doing. By suggesting that students may not produce the best product in the short term, he is underscoring his commitment to experiential learning and education oriented towards growth more than excellence.

Teacher as Trampoline

Faculty Fellows advocated for viewing the classroom as a space for students to grow, to improve, and to enjoy the process. However, when the product of learning is an

architectural work being built by a class for a local community organization, viewing the classroom as a place to be less-than-perfect can be dangerous.

During my conversation with Jason Miller, he told me that growth in education occurs through dialogue. He shared his belief that educational experiences are not meaningful if there is no room for students to make mistakes during the process. I asked him if he viewed himself as a “safety net” for his students in the face of professional business obligations. He replied that his job was not to catch students when they fall, but rather to launch them and their vision into success:

I think that I provide a trampoline. So that, and hopefully, the trust that can be created in the classroom, is that, I’m going to hear them, I’m going to give them candid responses, I’m going to give them experienced, reasoned responses. Versus. . . pinning on what I think is best. So that they can stretch, but that they know there is going to be give and then pushback. So that they don’t just say, ‘well la di da. I can do whatever I want.’ That is certainly not our objective. (JM)

In Jason’s response to my question, I noted the ways that his student centered approach to education enabled him to assist students in generating and refining their own original thinking. As a result, he is not only able to encourage and bolster student confidence, but he also assists students in better understanding how to further nurture their own ideas later in life. He went on to describe how this process plays out in his courses, and how he feels students perceive his educational philosophy:

It’s to say, “you propose, I rebut, you refute—we dialogue.” And, as a result, I can give them a safety net that is more like a trampoline. At the same time, I would say that they do the same for me. Right, like if I said, “it’s only a unilateral exchange.” well then burnout is inevitable, for the instructor. But if I can feel like I gained something from that process with them, like they are providing a trampoline for me. That they are willing to say, “yeah he’s trying something, here. And it might not

work. And if he's reflective enough to say that something didn't work, then I'm not going to fault him for that." As an instructor, "because he's not just doing it the same way. Tramping out the same stuff he's been ponying up for 10 years. Since he started teaching, that each time it's a little bit different. Each time, there's a little bit of risk. But that helps *me* learn just alongside their learning. (JM)

In describing himself as a trampoline for his students, Jason emphasized the dedication he feels to his students and the support he tries to offer. In this way, his comments offered me insight into the spirit of his teaching, where students' ideas are valued, even prioritized. We continued by discussing how his desire to keep his teaching practice fresh and exploratory aligned with the educational philosophy of BMC, and possibly even motivated students to bring their focus and attention to class meetings:

[John] That's amazing. It's really kind of a phenomenal ride that you end up taking them on as a result of that. As I've talked to some other teachers, they've mentioned [that] what ends up feeling important in their classroom is perhaps an element of spontaneity. And so, bringing in whatever flavor seems like a really important thing to bring to a modern education. It brings the students that, enthusiasm or curiosity to say, 'what's today going to be like?' And that creates a zeal. In its own.

[Jason] Yeah, and honestly, I think that if we don't find a way to reset ourselves into that environment, that it's not because we seek it, but it becomes a little bit stale... And in some ways the Black Mountain College Semester. . . being able to participate in that as a Fellow, and know that I had the opportunity to experiment and that I could explain at the beginning of the semester, "this will be an experiment. We will explore some weirdness in terms of what you are used to in the classroom." And, under the guise of that, it kind of gave me the agency to empower them. Is the notion that, I feel more empowered now to take greater risks. In the class. Because the response that came back, and the work that came through it was stronger. . . stronger in process, but maybe not in product, but that's maybe not the point. (JM)

Jason's comments highlight his concern for potential the changes—both positive and negative—in the interpersonal communication skills of today's traditional-age college

student. However, not all Faculty Fellows and coordinators from the BMCS agreed that emerging generations of learners are different than previous generations.

It's all Just Generational Stuff

Tom Hansell defended the habits and dispositions of young people today, arguing that Millennials behave in much the same way as the generations that came before them. We discussed the changes he has seen in education and in the students with whom he works:

[John] Have you noticed any changes in education, from when you began to now, as a teacher?

[Tom] That's actually a very difficult question, but a good and thoughtful one. . . It is interesting, I think that one thing that has kind of changed in the outside world, is that I certainly hear a lot more—and maybe I'm just more sensitive to it—but I hear a lot more Millennial bashing. And I just don't think it's that helpful. And you know there is always some. . . You know stereotypes don't come out of nowhere—you know they exist for a reason—but in general, I feel like our students here at App are engaged, I mean there are always a few duds, but they're generally like wanting to make things better has been my experience. So I always try to put the quash on any kind of Millennial bashing [laughs] that comes about. And plus I can remember doing a lot of that same stuff when I was a kid. The same stuff people complain about, it's just generational stuff. (TH)

Tom's comments reflect a belief in the timeless dimensions of human nature that are attributed to generational stereotyping. His opinion reflects the idea that humanity and human nature are central elements within any context of place or time. Although I found his comments insightful, I also noted that several Faculty Fellows and coordinators of the BMCS were adamant that changes to our communication landscape are having a significant impact on the hearts and minds of emerging generations.

Ways to Engage in the World Around Me

Tom Hansell and I concluded our conversation by discussing the relationship between education and democracy. I asked him to share his thoughts on the role education plays in cultivating a democratic society. He responded by describing the roles that process, community, and problem solving play in meeting the challenges of an uncertain future:

Well I think education is essential for democracy, and in some ways, it's about.... It's not necessarily education about learning a bunch of facts, but it's education about learning a process. A process to solve problems, a process to see what other people are saying or doing about a certain topic. A process about how to engage your neighbors or your colleagues, or your collaborators, or your opponents [laugh] in a debate, or in some kind of collective activity to solve problems. So I really think, education is essential to democracy, but it's not just education like, "oh I now know everything that's in my history book." it's education "and now I know a number of ways in which I can engage in the world around me." Whether that's scientific research, or historic research. or a collaborative arts project, [laughs] or a collaborative media project. Or any of these really broad ways. But, if there is a population that knows how to solve problems, knows how to get information, knows how to talk to people. . . and knows how to listen to people. Then I think we are much more democratic as a society. (TH)

With his reply, I gained a sense that Tom designs his course to offer students opportunities to both develop and refine their problem solving skillsets. He described the purpose of education as offering students not only an opportunity to learn and retain important information, but to apply knowledge to real-world situations and community-based contexts.

Locus of Our Orientation to the World

In contrast to Tom's concerns of "Millennial bashing" and stereotyping current generations, several participants described the significant impact they feel ICTs are having on students' identities as well as their cultural values. During my conversation with James

Toub, I asked him to describe the changes he has noticed in the years that he has been teaching and to discuss the challenges he faces as an educator. In his response, he speculated on what he felt was the likely profound impact that communication technologies are having on the students he teaches:

[John] What is the greatest challenge that you face as an educator?

[James] I don't know actually. I think the technology one is huge because I think there are a lot of things that... spring from it. That we have an intuition that the behaviors that we see today... might be the result of how they interact with technology. But, I can only say that anecdotally [because] I just don't know enough, I'm not sure anybody does at this point about the degree to which behavior has changed because of these technologies. (JT)

James' comments suggest that technology is not only having an impact on the students he works with, and the curriculum he designs, but that its impact also difficult to measure or fully comprehend.

James went on to share a story of traveling to the AppState Loft in New York City with his family, and watching his daughter and her friends interacting with one another through ICTs. He told me he believed that ICTs may be impacting not only what information they access, but also how they related to the world and one another:

And this past summer I was in New York, directing the Loft, and... when my wife came my daughter brought 3 of her friends, and I got to see them all day cause we were all in the loft. And what was so... What made a gigantic impression on me, was the way they relate to their phones. And the way they relate to each other through their phones even though they are sitting right next to each other like this [gestures and laughs]. It's like, I had no idea how important, and how central, this device has become for the way they communicate with each other. That is new, because the technology is new. (JT)

James described the ways that his daughter and her friends connected and communicated with each other through their phones, even when sitting next to one another. In witnessing their communication habits, he noted his increasing awareness of the evolving nature of communication and human relationships. He went on to further articulate the ways in which he felt our connections to the world and to each other might be changing:

And this is happening to kids at younger and younger ages. So, the result of that, I think, is that their frame of reference is bound, in a sense, by their relationship to this device. And.. For all of us who existed before these devices existed, we have other frames of reference. You know. Most of, half of my life was without these, even my son. But now, she's going to be at ASU, she's going to be a college kid in 3 years. She going to be in my class, or your class. And they're already in our classes, these 18 year-olds whose entire life has grown up with [it].... and this is their frame of reference and they don't know a world without it. They don't have any frame of reference for what life would be like without this. And because it's such a powerful tool, powerful instrument—in so many ways they are only growing—that I think it has had a pretty profound consequence on how people relate to each other, how they relate to themselves, [and] how they learn. Their capacity for concentration. Their capacity, even for curiosity. Their ability to remember things. (JT)

In his comments, I noted his view that technology was not merely a new element or tool being introduced into our world, but rather something that is fundamentally shifting our relationship with reality. As we concluded this part of our discussion, he summed up the ways in which he feels our realities are shifting:

And I see it in myself even, but I definitely see it in. . . You know, in just having something. . . The whole idea of your own body as the locus of your orientation to the world, I think, is challenged by having a virtual sense of the world [laughs]. I think that's bigger than we even fully get. Because once you lose your corporality, your materiality, your physical-ness, I think you lose something very fundamental to your nature as a human [laughs]. I would say. That's some pretty heavy stuff. (JT)

James' comments about the ways our "locus" of "orientation to the world" is changing struck me as profound and poetic. Having backgrounds in educational technology and media studies, I approached my dissertation research with a desire to better understand the ways in which ICTs were impacting the work and lives of educators today. The comments by James and other Faculty Fellows and coordinators of the BMCS at once reinforced and broadened my understanding of the nature of these impacts.

Yielding to Structure

We went on to discuss how the enduring presence of educational paradigms in which students are expected to produce the right answer, or the answer that the teacher is expecting, have a noticeable impact on a learner's identity and their opinion on the work they are expected to generate:

[John] Has anything changed in the way that you strive to cultivate curiosity in these more recent years? What it takes to reach a student today?

[James] Well... I think how to cultivate curiosity... I think what has always been important to me, early in my career and even more important now, or as important now, is not to give the answer. [Students] come and they want me to tell them the answer. Because they think that's the end of their job. Their job is to find out what I want, and once they find out what I want, then there is nothing more for them to do. (JT)

I noted that James' comments reveal not only a persisting paradigm in education that is perpetuated by the structure of the institution, but also how such a mentality relieves learners from any accountability or responsibility to think for themselves or pursue their own original ideas.

Further, as processes of teaching and learning do not occur in a vacuum, educators must frequently find appropriate ways to critique socio-political structures while operating within them. James continued by describing the “many compromises” he has made in his effort to satisfy the constraints in which institutions of higher education are grounded:

Sure. And I can say all of this. And some classes, depending on if the class lends itself more to this kind of thinking. But, I’ve had to make many compromises. Because I have to find a balance between saying “the class is about you and you come up with the answers” and fitting in to a system which is so much greater and more powerful than just this one voice, you know. And so the question is how to satisfy the needs of the system, while also doing the things that I find to be more valuable and more important. And that has been an ongoing challenge for forever for me. Because this institution is not that progressive, really. I mean there are progressive people in it. And some really great thinkers and practitioners, but the system that we live with is bigger than them. And the system itself is highly bureaucratic [and] regulated by state authorities, which mandate that we have to do this, that, and the other thing, and you certainly see it in k-12 more than here. (JT)

James’ comments point to his acknowledgement of the inherent tensions existing between academic structure and freedom in higher education. In describing his approach to teaching and curriculum design, he mentions having to make sacrifices and compromises in order to do his job. In some ways, such talk of sacrifices reflects the reality of working within the imposed structure of the University, while in other ways it reflects the reality of working with a population of students who perceives education as equally transactional.

Placing Art at the Center

In considering how to prepare students to face the challenges and opportunities of tomorrow, I asked James to share his thoughts on the relationships between art, art making, and cultivating a democratic society:

Ah good question! That's good! I was just going to say that if you have a system, as we do, in the public schools and the university, in this country, which have a lot of bureaucratic regulations and mandates to conform to certain standards that are alien to what people would naturally do--and are created by people who really are not educators [laughs]: [instead by] politicians or legislatures. One of the most powerful, I think, forms of resistance to that kind of overly bureaucratic kind of regulation, is art. Because art is, visual arts at least, and maybe other forms too, are the ones that are the most difficult to regulate. That politicians, bureaucrats, regulators, administrators, don't really know what art is. And don't know how to measure it. How to determine when it's successful or not. And so, they are beholden to the artists and the art teachers. (JT)

In his comments, I noted his belief that artistic expression may be an appropriate platform for subverting dominant and oppressive structures of power in our world today. He next described how society, by-in-large, is not taught to appreciate art, and therefore does not know what to make of it:

But, it's a place, there's a space, within this sort of machine, if you want [laughs]—this mechanistic model that regulates how we operate—that resists regulation. The terms that are used to regulate what you learn in math, and in the sciences, and in education, and all of that... don't work for art. So in that respect, there's a space, there's potential there, in creative practice, to do things that the system doesn't understand. That can provide alternatives, in fact, to the system. And it is potentially the place where democracy can work. In a way that people feel free to express themselves . . . and that's one of the things that 50, 60, 70 years later that people look back to Black Mountain as a model because they placed art at the center of the curriculum. Because [John Andrew Rice] had this belief that it's through art, that freedom could be expressed. (JT)

James commented that art making and art appreciation must be viewed as essential curricular components in an age of mass communication.

Teaching Skills that are Transferable

In an effort to further understand the underlying theory to his educational practice, I asked James to share his thoughts on the broader aims of education:

[John] What would you say is the purpose of education today?

[James] Well, I teach stuff that's deemed by many to be useless, and irrelevant, and in some ways it is. Because it's not practical or pragmatic. And if you take courses with me, it's not going to easily transfer into a job. And a lot of people want that, and I understand that. And that's important. But I think what's more important than the practical is an understanding that the nature of work, and the nature of the job market that exists today, is a very volatile, very fragmented, very transitory one...The changes in technology are accelerating, and to such a degree that if you spend all your time learning a software package today, you are going to be obsolete five years from now. . . You'll be irrelevant. (JT).

James Toub states that the objectives of his courses are not focused on the acquisition of any particular skillset, technique, or style, but rather a focus upon the ability to successfully “transfer” knowledge across multiple professional environments. He went on to explain why the ability to transfer was such an important skillset for the 21st Century:

So my argument is to teach skills that are transferrable. So that what you learn today, in the context of today, can be transferred to the new context of tomorrow. So that the software will change, the technology is going to change, but your capacity to learn new things, to adapt, to the very quickly changing landscape, is going to be the difference between the person who can succeed, and the one who doesn't. And so what can we do to create an environment that, is one where students have a great degree of flexibility, resiliency, teamwork, critical thinking, the capacity for um teaching themselves new things. Those, if you can acquire all of those different qualities, and more important than all of them, is curiosity. (JT)

In his comments, I note that James Toub's overarching educational philosophy involves broad macro skillsets, which can be applied across a range of professional contexts. He went

on to explain the value of curiosity and the exploration of one's own identity as essential to living a productive life in the 21st Century:

[James] Because if you have curiosity, then you have motivation to figure it out. But if you are not curious, then you are just going to want someone else to tell you what to do. hahaha, you know, and so, [I do] whatever I can... through whatever I teach, to help instill these qualities of resiliency. And so, ultimately that's what I'm really teaching, is [transfer]. And the degree to which I can do that and help to foster those kinds of attitudes is [essential]. And at the core of that is really "who are you? What is your own vision?" That's the School of Vision, is that you see, and, but what that means is seeing for yourself. Seeing with your own eyes, and through that process experiencing things for yourself, and through that you then, come up with your own solutions to them. To the problems that you face. That can be aided by everything you learn in school and everything else, but their just tools to a larger end. So there you have it!

[John] And then some! (JT)

James' philosophy of education is informed by a context of uncertainty. He emphasized transfer and resiliency as a means of teaching students about the importance of adapting to emerging ever-shifting world contexts.

The Age of Impossible

Given the distinct contrasts found in these past and present contexts of learning, many participants expressed that a school like BMC would be all but impossible to produce today. James Toub shared what he perceives to be the irreconcilable contrast between education as it existed at BMC, and education as it exists in the context of our world in the 21st Century:

It's not a big leap, based upon what I have been saying, to get to Black Mountain, because a lot of the things that I've been talking about were very central to that school... but I don't think, given everything that we've been talking about, that a place like Black Mountain would be possible today... there's too many things that would really inhibit the kind of program they had, the kind of institution it was, and

the kinds of innovations that they brought about. The degree of control that society has over individuals today is just mind boggling, compared to the freedom that people back then enjoyed to do things under the radar, if you want, or outside the established norms. I think in part because the established norms were not as bureaucratized, then, as they are today. And I think that the ubiquity of all these new technologies—and the capacity to beam what we are doing right now, all over the world instantaneously—transforms what happens here right now, that would make the kind of things that were happening in isolation at Black Mountain... impossible. Now, that doesn't mean that something amazingly innovative couldn't happen today, it just wouldn't be that. [Laughing] You know. And what form something amazingly innovative will take, with all of these technologies. . . Well that remains to be seen. You know. I'm not. . . I just don't. . . and they may be happening as we speak. Who knows, you know? (JT)

James' comments reinforce the belief that the cultural context of education today is markedly different from the context of education during the BMC. He described the ways in which a student's learning experience was likely enhanced by an uncompromisingly tranquil and hyper-focused educational environment. In discussing the tranquility of the learning processes he experienced at BMC in 1949, Fielding Dawson (1991) relayed how BMC truly was removed from the context of daily life in the outside world.

In light of the context in which education occurs today, James also suggested that the "isolated" nature of education at BMC played into student's and teacher's ability to remain completely focused and attentive learning. Further, as seen in the following excerpt from our conversation, he argued that the quality of education today may be suffering from our collective inability, as a culture, to unplug from an ever-present and seemingly unhealthy relationship ICTs:

I think so. I mean, then, it was considered to be isolated. Black Mountain was a place where, if you went to there, to the Lake Eden campus for instance, you would be cut off, you would not have access to what was going on in New York. I mean you would

through letters and telephone, but it would be far more remote than today. So, things could happen there, in isolation, that would give them a certain freedom to do things without being scrutinized, I suppose, that I don't think you could do today. I don't think that... Maybe there are places where this is happening, but I... People don't want to give up their cell phones, I'm sure. (JT)

In many ways, James Toub's comments suggest that "something like Black Mountain" may emerge out of our relationship with ICTs, rather than in spite of it. Regardless, the spirit of quiet and uninterrupted focus cultivated at Black Mountain is likely impossible to recreate today.

Black Mountain College was Out of Touch

Describing the tranquility of the learning processes he experienced at BMC in 1949, Fielding Dawson (1991) relayed how BMC truly was removed from the context of daily life in the outside world.

The basic, most accurate criticism of the school, that it was out of touch with reality, not involved in matters of the world, is true. But that's all. Nothing else can be said, there is no other criticism possible... Black Mountain was a place of its own being, like freedom, it didn't nullify or ignore The Real World—it was away from it. The world wasn't there, like the other side of the mirror, or beyond the horizon (that fascinated Melville [and Olson, and me, and Black Mountain]), every aspect intangible, invisible, except the lush natural Paradise that is was. (p. 56)

Although Fielding Dawson referred to BMC as "out of touch with reality," in many ways it was perhaps more in touch with the realities of the curriculum and the natural world than any other college of its time, or perhaps ever since. Students at BMC approached their studies in an environment that nurtured total focus, presence, and attentiveness to the educational experience.

An Undercurrent of Authoritarianism

Echoing a critique of the overly structured nature of both universities and K-12 schools, Jeff Goodman shared with me that he fears that structure may be stifling critical and higher-order thinking in schools today:

We have this undercurrent of authoritarianism built into structures like school and church and I really fight against that, because I think if we really want to have a vibrant and humane democracy, you have to have classrooms that are vibrant, humane, and democratic... And obviously, democratic in my conception is not... majority rules, it's about more of a conventual, communitarian democracy. Right so... I think classrooms are exactly the place where we need to learn that, and we need to overhaul what is going on in schools, both here at the university and K-12. To represent, what we say our values are. (JG)

Jeff's desire to see education as a place to counter authoritarianism and further encourage critical and creative thinking in students may seem like a significant obstacle to overcome, however he feels we must re-orient systems of education to align with our values as a society of creativity, innovation, and democracy.

Jeff went on to argue that—despite some people's desire to preserve authoritarian structures—societies that espouse democracy should find ways of modeling divergent thinking within their systems of education:

In a culture where we say we are valuing a democratic approach to knowledge, we are actually modeling something that is much more appropriate for this hierarchical, authoritarian, text-based, literalist world. And that's the problem I see, is that our aspirations, our goals, or what we say are our goals for education, actually are not generally enacted in the processes of the classroom. (JG)

Jeff's comments point to the ways in which our values as a progressive society often seem

out of alignment with structural realities of today's schools—across K-12 and higher education contexts.

The Academic Cycle

In describing the greatest challenge she faces in education today, Jody Servon spoke to me about working within the context of a system of higher education that always wants more:

It's about trying to do way to many things, and do them all well, I mean that's the huge thing. I wish that I could focus more on particular things. And I think that's the academic cycle. Like, okay here's the year, what service are you going to do? You know. What's your teaching going to be? What are all of these things, and they are competing constantly . . . I wish there was more of a value on doing things really well, as opposed to doing more. And then the resources right—like how often do we get raises? (JS)

Jody's comments suggested to me that her professional obligations related to work as a tenure track professor bordered on unsustainable. I tried to echo and affirm her remarks by mentioning the importance of self-care and showing vulnerability in our roles as teachers:

[John] We've got to sort of be there to inspire [students], but then there's also showing up in a whole piece, [I laughed] every day to do the work.

[Jody] I've tried to do more modeling, particularly because I have more female students. Just showing that there's a life outside of here... It doesn't always seem like you can have a family, and have a career... That seems unattainable sometimes and I let them know. [But], when are you oversharing? I try to be really conscious of boundaries. And making sure that I'm comfortable, and not making anyone else uncomfortable. But, I don't think that all of that should be hidden from them too, because if this is the kind of life that they want, then they should know some of the realities of what that means. (JS)

She refers to the unrealistic expectations put on her—and the burdens she imposes upon herself—as institutional “acts of violence.” Jody described her aims as a teacher as working towards exposing students to underrepresented artists. Even when engaged in readings about

dominant artistic forms, she described the steps she takes to direct students toward artists that represent minorities, both in their notoriety and race, gender, and class backgrounds:

I guess just different things that kind of struck me from [the BMCS was] the playfulness of recognizing when a story wasn't told, and making sure to point out, "we may not have time to fully go into what these alternative stories are," but making sure that we recognize that this is only a perspective—or a range of perspectives—that's getting revealed... So how do we flip that?... Because we don't always know when we are doing it too. When we are kind of chugging along, and following the script that we've been taught. Right? When do we question and make sure that they feel safe that they can go "hey that made me uncomfortable." or "why are we talking about this?" or "how come it seems that these are the [only] kinds of people who are coming into the conversation?" and if I've made it a priority to share other perspectives and make them look for other perspectives. Then, hopefully it's just going to enrich what we see and what we think about. (JS)

Jody's comments underscore the ways that she is able to use art books that represents the dominant paradigm to reveal their bias. In doing so, she is able to connect students with a broader understanding of the art and artists that exist beyond the bourgeois.

She continued by describing how higher education broadly might evolve to better cultivate diversity within institutions. When I asked for her thoughts regarding shaping the future of learners and educational institutions, she stressed to cultivate a more diverse pool of educators:

[John] How can we, as educators, best prepare students to take their place in the 21st Century?

[Jody] I think we have to really broaden who is teaching, I think that is huge. I think that is one of the biggest problems that we have in academia. When you think about the cycle of who is able to teach and for how long, that change isn't coming [as] fast... as our students need it to happen. So I think that that's a big one, is having many viewpoints. I mean if you think about the politics and beliefs of who is teaching at the university. And then the privilege of who gets to teach here. In terms

of class and race and gender. (JS)

In Jody's comments, I noted her belief that cultivating diversity in faculty positions would also serve to cultivate diversity in student populations.

Dialogue with Administrators and Community Members

During my conversation with Ray Miller, I asked him to discuss what lessons and values he believed we could take away from BMC and apply to our own teaching:

[John] What steps can we take to bring progressive education into a highly bureaucratic university? Our time is constrained. Not only do we have families to get home to, but, you know, the bell rings after an hour and fifteen minutes. What do we glean from progressive education here at App, and maybe what has to be sacrificed?

[Ray] In terms of really having a long term impact, we need to involve our administrators because they are the ones who talk to the board, to the citizens of North Carolina, to the tax payers, to the people who live in this community. And they know how to talk to these people, okay? And they are the ones that need to be brought into this in ways that are practical and meaningful for them. Now that's quite the challenge... but if we are going to move towards something that is more Black Mountain-esque, which I think that we should—I really do—then we need to find ways by which to engage these other constituencies and that's where our administrators can be helpful. (RM)

In his comments, I noted the ways that Ray felt that lasting and impactful change in education may come from involving constituents from the same bureaucratic structures that BMC fought to resist. By generating dialogue and interest around important issues with community members and higher education administrators, Ray feels we may be able to bring about educational movements that have a lot in common with BMC.

Touching upon the ways in which education can be a driver of equity in our world, I asked Tom Hansell to share his thoughts on the relationship between media making—as a

21st Century tool of communication and expression—and democracy—commonly seen as a goal of education. His reply suggested that media making could only be a tool for social justice when used in conjunction with elements of community organizing:

I think education is essential for democracy . . . It's not necessarily education about learning a bunch of facts, but it's education about learning a process. A process to solve problems, a process to see what other people are saying or doing about a certain topic. A process about how to engage your neighbors or your colleagues. or your collaborators, or your opponents [laugh] in a debate, or in some kind of collective activity to solve problems. . . If there is a population that knows how to solve problems, knows how to get information, knows how to talk to people... and knows how to listen to people. Then I think we are much more democratic as a society.
(TH)

In Tom's comments about the purposes of education, I noted his belief that education serves a greater purpose than the acquisition of knowledge.

Tom shared his belief that individuals who learn media making possess the ability to enact change in our world, however he felt media making would need to be complimented with community outreach, in order to best connect with the stories and issues that ought to be shared. Conversely, he described how, without art and creative ways to share your message, community organizing is also diminished:

That's where media can be democratizing. As an organizing tool and a way to give voice to those who often do not have voice—or give tools to people who often don't have opportunity. (TH)

Tom's comments suggest that art and art making alone may not be that democratizing, but that such skillsets can be transformative and emancipatory when used to tell stories about important social groups and community causes.

Black Mountain College Was Never Satisfied

Billy Schuman emphasized the importance of experience and process in education, and the ways in which App State and BMC seem to be aligned in this pursuit. In discussing the ways in which university growth tends to diminish experimentation, he told me that, from his perspective, Appalachian State University has stayed true to its educational mission, even while growing:

[John] Where/how does the spirit of BMC fit in with what we are doing?" I asked.

[Billy] I think it's that spirit of creativity. In a way, you get a unique take from me because I'm not that well-schooled in that history and those specific techniques of painters, or the things that we would consider the expertise of [BMC] scholarship. But I do understand that at the heart of that was this idea of experimentation. And letting things happen. . . And this is why I say that. It's clearly a long way to go, but. . . I guess Black Mountain's goal of not being satisfied with where you are at, just being satisfied with where you can go in the present. (BS)

Billy's comments suggest that while a mid-sized university such as App State likely cannot escape structure and bureaucracy in the way that BMC did, educators can work to establish a trajectory that promotes democratic education. Further, by staying true to those goals despite increasing structure and bureaucratization, Appalachian State University continues to serve progressive and critical interests and experiences in education, while BMC was forced to close down to due financial burdens.

Conclusion

The findings in this chapter of my dissertation research underscore the importance of valuing the ways in which social, political, economic, and environmental contexts shape the nature and trajectory of educational structures and curricula. Faculty Fellows and

coordinators of the BMCS at times presented understandings of today's learners that appear at odds, or in conflict, with one another. For instance, while Jason Miller described the "sense of agency" possessed by students today, James Toub argued that many students still want the teacher to tell them what the right answer is, because discovering this correct answer represents the end of their responsibilities. Speaking to these inherent tensions, Jeff Goodman noted the "undercurrent of authoritarianism" that seems predominate across contemporary educational structures, and the ways that such structures run counter to many of the values we espouse through our educational philosophies.

Perhaps most notable were the ideas and stories shared related to the impact that contemporary information and communication technologies (ICTs) are having on teaching, learning, and living in our world today. James Toub's comment that the "locus" of our orientation to the world was shifting due to our emerging virtual presence in the world. James argued that any curricula that does not address or embrace these shifts in our relationship with reality could be seen as misguided or disingenuous. His comments about the impact of ICTs on education and the world around led us to consider the importance of presence, singular focus, and isolation as components integral components of education at BMC. In this way, BMC represented an era in education that was at once "out of touch" (Dawson, 1991, p. 56) with the realities of the world, while also being perhaps more in touch with the directly observable and immediately perceived realities. As a result, I began referring to BMC as an "age of impossible" that likely cannot be replicated within our present educational context.

Chapter 8

Discussion and Suggestions for Future Research

In this chapter, I provide a discussion of the findings that emerged during my dissertation research, discuss recommendations for actions that can be taken to increase the quality of learning experiences in higher education, and suggest future areas of study that researchers might pursue to further explore the spirit of progressive education in the 21st Century.

Recap of Key Findings

The purpose of my dissertation research was to explore the history and legacy of Black Mountain College (1933-1957) through the phenomena of the Black Mountain College Semester (2018) as a means to locate the spirit of progressive education in the 21st Century. Four broad themes emerged in my findings related to this inquiry: 1) Student Centered, articulated as a teacher's desire to foreground the needs, interests, and strengths of the individual in teaching and learning; 2) Community Minded, expressed as a teachers aim to build and illustrate connections between individuals both in and beyond the classroom; 3) Experiential Learning, encompassing a teacher's pedagogical beliefs related to the value of learning by doing, and 4) Context, which represented the influence and impact of the world outside the classroom on teaching, learning, and curriculum.

The Forward in *Democracy of Higher Education*, by Harry Boyt (2010), outlines the elements of a democratic model of education and offers key questions for educators who seek to design meaningful learning experiences in the 21st Century:

Democracy in Higher Education does more than document and interpret a set of stories of the continuing, usually invisible, democratic tradition of public work and politics in the land-grant system. It also suggests the potential for cultural change in all of our institutions. What would it look like if teaching across colleges and universities were a public activity? What are the public conditions and effects of scholarship? What happens if the norms of higher education encourage faculty and staff [to] learn to see themselves as public people, in sustained partnership and collaborative work with other citizens? What new resources might be tapped and cultivated? What new energies can be unleashed by more public cultures in which the whole is more than the sum of the parts? (p. xx)

This chapter addresses these questions in light of the findings of my research and offers suggestions for cultivating meaningful educational practices and for exploring future areas of study.

Discussion

The tensions at play between academic structure and freedom were prominent throughout the past and present educational practices explored in this study. Within the first three themes of my findings, the structure of an institution seemed to determine not only the degree to which a student was free to pursue their own interests, but also the nature and scope of community within a school.

When describing the purpose of education at BMC, Josef Albers explained that his teaching of art did not aim to “fill museums” (Harris, 2017, p. 24) but rather to offer students an invitation to participant. Albers wrote that “We do not always create ‘works of art,’ but rather experiments” (p. 24). While I noted tensions between academic structure and freedom throughout the first three themes of my research findings, a different type of tension emerged amidst my fourth theme, “context.” Throughout my conversations with Faculty Fellows and

coordinators of the BMCS, participants noted how Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have impacted both their work as educators and their personal lives. In a moment that stands out as one of the most profound and striking of my entire study, James Toub referred to the “locus” (JT) of human perception as presently shifting away from the five senses in light of our evolving and unfolding relationship with technology. For me, his comments underscore broader implications for the ways in which teaching and learning must be re-envisioned to meet the contemporary and emerging nature of reality.

Structure and Freedom

Collectively, my findings illuminate the value of a student centered approach to education. Faculty Fellows and coordinators overwhelmingly described their desire to turn classes and educational experiences over to students. Similarly, documents related to the history of the BMC describe an uncompromising commitment to placing the learner at the center of their curriculum. Both past and present eras of education positioned the needs, interests, and talents of the students as a first concern. Yet, participants also described the ways in which educational structures limited the extent to which a student centered philosophy could be enacted. In the documents I reviewed related to the history of the BMC, I noted that academic freedom existed in tension with, and opposition to, other educational institutions of the day, which were predominantly highly structured.

Faculty Fellows and coordinators of the BMCS emphasized the importance of building community in the classroom, however the ways in which they went about doing so were as varied and divergent as the topics they teach. From aesthetic teaching practices, to

service learning experiences with local and regional community partners, the findings from this study suggest that the word community in higher education carried two distinct meanings: 1) community in the classroom among peers, and 2) community beyond the classroom with local and regional partners. Findings from this study suggest that community-minded approaches to education can take on many forms and involve varying degrees of emersion.

For example, participants described the ways in which they fostered a community-minded approach to teaching and learning by enacting a range of participatory, creative, and collaborative processes. From beginning of the semester introductions, to theatrical warmups, to student portfolio reviews, Faculty Fellows and coordinators of the BMCS shared their strategies for getting students to work together in playful, yet purposeful ways. These practices shared the common theme of positioning students to collaborate to create or share products of learning. In doing so, the power dynamic shifts away from the teacher as the primary source of knowledge and towards the learner's personal and shared experiences with colleagues. In an age of higher education involving a push to online and asynchronous learning, building informal and personal connections with a community of learners in a shared space may prove be one of the greatest qualities of face-to-face higher education today.

My research findings revealed the way experiential learning also exists in tension between academic structure and freedom. During my interview with Jeff Goodman (2018), he distinguished his brand of teaching from what he called, "hard constructivism." While he

described his educational philosophy as based in exploration and experimentation, he also didn't think students needed to "invent photosynthesis" each semester. I feel Jeff Goodman's comments succinctly represent a foundational belief shared by all Faculty Fellows and coordinators, which is that students ought to be given enough structure initially to frame the task at hand.

Learning and Power

Placing a student in control of their learning may be a worthwhile pursuit, however students in the 21st Century, by-in-large, are not prepared to take that kind of ownership over their learning, as they have not previously been given the opportunity to do so. Gibson (2010) argued that turning learning experiences over to students demands a careful approach. He stated that, "asking students to take ownership of their learning requires them to develop the capacity to plan and manage their own learning and to make the conceptual shift from learning a subject to becoming an active problem solver" (p. 611). In arguing that students need to develop capacities for autonomous learning, Gibson is suggesting that students do not enter the classroom already in possession of these skillsets. We need to slow down and take the time to learn how to turn a class over to students and, more importantly, teach students how to thrive in that kind of learning environment.

Relevance in the World

Building community involved the cultivation of partnerships, alliances, and collaborations with local and regional groups and organizations. Some community oriented projects took the form of service learning, while others involved the creation of professional

design projects. Faculty Fellows and coordinators of the BMCS shared that community-related projects fulfilled several objectives in their curriculum: 1) increasing student motivation by demonstrating the relevance and practical application of scholarly areas of study, and 2) positioning students to make societal contributions even before graduating. Participants expressed concerns that student motivation can suffer when educational assignments seem irrelevant to the world outside of school and that learning experiences grounded within community partnerships often provide students with additional motivation and inspiration to invest in their education. Building upon the idea of inspiration and motivation, Faculty Fellows and coordinators also shared that community-based projects allowed them to transition their curriculum away from “esoteric” (JM) acts of knowledge transfer and towards more meaningful and beneficial work. In this way, Faculty Fellows are positioning students to see themselves—and be perceived—as agents of change.

Community at a small and isolated college like BMC was expressed in markedly different ways than it is in higher education today, even during the BMCS. Although Faculty Fellows and coordinators of the BMCS described community as “perhaps the most important” (JG) element of education, the context of higher education at a mid-sized university in the year 2018 precluded the tight-knit nature of community found at BMC. The entire college community at BMC ate dinner together every night, cleaned and gardened together, exercised together, and performed plays and concerts together. Some educational collaborations that emerged from the unassuming campus of Lake Eden, like Cage and Cunningham, remain famous to this day, however John Dewey’s (1940) description of BMC

as “a living example of democracy in action” referred to the Colleges’ sustainable practices rather than any cutting edge artistic accomplishments.

The level of cohesion between students at BMC wasn’t even possible at other universities in the United States during the first half of the 20th Century, much less at Appalachian State University in the year 2018, which at the time had approximately 18,000 undergraduates. In an age where education must position learners to solve the greatest problems our planet has ever faced (United Nations, 2015), teachers must ensure that their curriculum remains relevant to our world and true to this task. Yet within the structure of education at our mid-sized university in the 21st Century, Faculty Fellows and coordinators were able to assist students in cultivating meaningful community partnerships and alliances.

Interestingly, when compiling literature with search terms like “building community in higher education,” the predominant search results related to the notion of developing community in online spaces. There are important reasons that so much attention and energy has gone towards building communities in these spaces.

Although the specific challenges related to the field of online education are outside of the scope of my research, these issues form the basis of my argument for the importance of face-to-face and community-minded educational experiences in the 21st Century. Attending higher education in face-to-face environments exposes students—particularly in rural areas—to perspectives, opinions, and beliefs they likely would not be exposed to had they stayed home: either enrolling in an online degree program, or beginning work directly after high school. In light of the important role that physically attending a university plays in building

community among learners, faculty in higher education must find ways to integrate community-minded values—space, place, and hands-on experience—into the structure of their curriculum and the pedagogies embodied in their classroom practice.

Locus of Orientation

Commenting on the significant cultural shifts of the 21st Century, James Toub speculated that our evolving relationship with ICTs is causing a shift in the “locus of [our] orientation” to the world (JT). For me, this comment brought into focus the notable shifts in teaching, learning, and living in the 21st Century. Life in our world today is no longer grounded solely in the physical world. As many of our experiences in the world are now mediated by ICTs—from managing bank accounts, to enrolling in health care, to enjoying family photos—educators must pay increasing attention to the ways such interactions shift our orientation to the world.

Even in its day, BMC was considered isolated and cut off from society. As discussed in Vignette D of my findings, Fielding Dawson (1991) stated that the one legitimate critique people had with education at BMC was that it was removed from society. Education at BMC was not focused on, or directly influenced by, current events. As such, students were free to develop their own identities in relationships to the curriculum they studied, without also worrying about the current state of affairs outside of the classroom—which included the rise of fascism and racial and gender inequities. I noted the ways this freedom seemed to position students to focus fully on their topics they were studying, saving any concerns about the challenges facing the world until after graduating.

Although BMC's approach to education was possible in the first half of the 20th Century, according to participants, such practices may perhaps be impossible today. This realization led me to wonder what BMC would be like if it had opened its doors in the year 2018. What choices would the founders make in how to manage a college in the 21st Century? Although the coordinators of the BMCS developed this event as a means by which to celebrate and critique the history and legacy of BMC, they also acknowledged the stark differences between the substantial structure of Appalachian State University, and the all but structureless context of teaching, learning, and living at BMC.

Henry Jenkins described our world as a "participatory culture," where information circulated both top-down and bottom-up (Jenkins, 2009). In a participatory culture, audiences are at once receivers, senders, and curators of information. In light of our digitally mediated context of living, I am left questioning what can be embodied and repurposed from BMC's brand of education, and what must be discarded? What does a "fully awake" (Lane, 1990; Zommer & House, 2008) educational experience look like in the 21st Century? Is it wise, or even possible, to unplug given our modern context of living?

Sherry Turkle (2012) argued that while we may seek to build networks and friendships in online spaces, we are increasingly isolated from the people we interact with in the physical world. Turkle would likely argue that the only way to build community within schools today is to reduce the presence of ICTs and emphasize the role of interpersonal communication in teaching and learning. Yet, in light of our participatory culture (Jenkins, 2009), perhaps schools need to find a way to foster interpersonal dialogue in the classroom,

while also teaching students to represent their ideas, values, and beliefs in digitally mediated spaces.

This duality represents one of the most universal and significant educational tensions of the 21st Century. In an age of tech-saturation, we do not reach or engage learners with the latest digital polling device, software simulation, or discussion forum. Instead, we engage learners by providing them with opportunities to express themselves in ways that are authentic to their personal and cultural identities, while also inviting students to slow down and unplug from their increasingly digital lives.

Discussion Summary

The freedom offered to students at BMC was matched by few other colleges or Universities of the day, and is all but extinct in formal institutions of education today. But perhaps the tensions outlined above are what make BMC so worth exploring in our present day: tensions between past and present, between structure and freedom, between timeless and timely, between possible and impossible. Joseph Bathanti described BMC as a “Comet” that burned bright across the sky for 24 years. The founders were fierce in their convictions. They didn’t want to compromise their values for the sake of creating a more sustainable institution, they were following their “bliss” (Campbell & Moyers, 1988/1991) and the bliss of what they saw as the true spirit of learning and education.

Recommendations

As educators, we must reexamine what progressive education would look like in the context of our modern classrooms in order to sustain higher education and prepare for an uncertain future where creativity and innovation are essential.

Emphasize creative thinking. If we are going to ask our students to develop a capacity for autonomous learning, then we cannot logically think that they enter our classrooms already well versed in this practice. The implication for pledging our affinity for a student-centered approach to education is to also invest energy into *cultivating* that approach and instilling those values. These values imply a need for the development of general education and first year seminar courses catered towards the refinement of learner autonomy, but perhaps more importantly, they suggest that we need to scaffold the practice of independent learning in our courses.

A simple, yet profound recommendation is for universities (and K-12) to revitalize the arts in education. By the arts, I mean both the appreciation and critique of existing art, as well as art making. To live in a society where, as James Toub described, “people don’t know what to make of art,” (JT) is to live without the “awe” described by Richards (1996, p. 127).

In Chapter 2, I shared a quote by John Andrew Rice deploring the concept of becoming an “educated” person. Like Dewey (1940; 1938/1997), Rice perceived education as a *verb*, rather than a noun. In the eyes of progressive educators, education must be seen as a continuous and lifelong process. As teachers in higher education are only in a relationship with their students for 90 days at a time, they must strive to foster an inner passion and

autonomy for the practice of learning, and of being curious. I believe developing one's creative capacity is a central component in nurturing autonomy.

Similarly, BMC's notion of placing art at the center of the curriculum was revered and embraced by Faculty Fellows during the BMCS, yet these practices are statistically otherwise foreign to a student's experience in higher education. Ken Robinson (2010) argued that all children possess an inherent capacity for creative, imaginative, and divergent thinking, but these talents "mostly deteriorate" as a result of becoming educated in a system with a rigid emphasis on knowledge acquisition. Heeding Robinson's advice, we must advocate for courses, curriculum, and assignments—across colleges and disciplines—that encourage and nurture the inner creative talents of students.

BMC faculty and esteemed sculptor & poet M. C. Richards (1996), described the important contributions creativity makes to our lives, as well as the measure we must take to bring it about:

Creativity opens us to the offerings of the creative unconscious. From artistic mind, from the realm of growth and becoming, out of which forms arise. These offerings from spirit source are intrinsic to ourselves; they are not difficult to come by. They may be asleep and need to be awakened, or wounded and need to be healed, or repressed and need to be slowly and gently invited and exercised. (p. 126)

In Richards words, I hear a call to all educators to assist students in awaking their inner dormant potential. No time in recent history has the opportunity for this awakening been so ripe, and perhaps no time have we needed it more.

Building upon the idea of placing students at the center of the curriculum, institutions of higher education must nurture both attention to the aesthetics of the learning experience

and the artistic expression students throughout their coursework. The participants in my study noted a desire to see teachers across disciplines develop practices where students are encouraged to explore and appreciate the aesthetic elements of a given topic, while also expressing their emerging scholarly ideas in artistic and compelling ways.

Faculty Fellows and Coordinators of the BMCS described the ways they sought to cultivate creative learning experiences by expanding the notion of the “classroom” to include the local places within a short distance of the actual classroom. Ray Miller described the ways in which guest educator Cara Hagen engaged students in an activity where they left the classroom to explore movement and dance through a number of contexts. Similarly, Joseph Bathanti describe having class in “unconventional places” as a means by which to increase the quality of the educational experience. These experiences exemplify the notion of community building beyond the walls of the classroom. By inviting students to explore educational concepts in nearby authentic locations, these educators were seeking to make teaching and learning meaningful by changing the context of learning. Through learning that takes advantage of nearby non-classroom spaces, educators prompt students to consider the ways in which the often-abstract theoretical concepts we work with apply to real life situations. Through educational experiences that extend beyond the walls of the classroom—even if just by a little—teachers have an opportunity to demonstrate the direct impact or situatedness of curriculum within nearby local environments.

In addition to embracing the many facets of our digital world, findings from this study suggest that we must also, perhaps ironically, present our students with opportunities to

unplug from the hyper-connected realities of our world and to express themselves artistically in non-digital ways. This may involve transforming a game of catch with a ball into an exploration of the principles of grammar (Sotiropoulou-Zormpala, 2012), or avant-garde practices in social justice (CS), having students create roller coasters for gummy bears to demonstrate their understanding of laws of motion (JG), or working with community partners on projects of local importance (TH; JM; BS), or simply holding space for informal and interpersonal conversations where students share their ideas and experiences.

Although Sotiropoulou-Zormpala (2012) argued that teachers need not be trained arts educators in order to artistically, I would argue that educators across disciplines need to become versed in the principles of aesthetics and that these practices are approached by establishing a more central role for arts education in K-12 schools. This not only involves acknowledging the poetics of eloquently crafting a scholarly narrative, but also in recognizing the ways in which knowledge related to areas of study is represented artistically—often non-alphabetically—in media from popular culture: be it in the form of news, commerce, entertainment, or otherwise.

Placing the arts at the center of the curriculum will require educators to reconsider their own practices, while also requiring educational administrators and policy makers to make adaptive changes to the educational system. These changes involve not only developing curriculum related to the role of arts in an area of study, but also in developing institutional structures of support to incubate creative practices campus-wide. Two necessary types of artistic support centers needed within universities involve the nurturing of digital

and analogue art making. At Appalachian State, we have Documentary Film Services and the Digital Media Studio as university-wide resources for digital learning. In the analogue art world, there is the Instructional Materials Center (IMC) which assists students in creating visual representations of their work, including posters, and dioramas. Although these resources are vital to encouraging and supporting the role of the arts in educational experiences, in many ways they still exist on the periphery of the institution. In order for creative practices to thrive in higher education, they need to be part of the lifeblood of the institution: present in general education courses, concentrated programs of study, as well as within student enrichment activities and community events. I feel that administrators must further support and encourage faculty to develop, embrace, and integrate these skillsets.

(Re)aligning curriculum with students' locus of orientation. Teachers and administrators in higher education today have an obligation (Kellner & Share, 2007c; Rushkoff, 2010) to recognize the role that ICTs play in the way that individuals gather and consider information and knowledge in our world today. In some regards, this means that teachers should feel compelled generate discussion in their courses about our evolving relationships with information and knowledge and embrace the integration of media and ICTs in teaching and learning. In other regards, in acknowledging our interdependence and connections to media and ICTs, we must also resist digital-educational-culture and provide our students with an opportunity to *unplug* from our existence in “Present Shock” (Rushkoff, 2013). These are the tensions as I see them related to media and technology use in classrooms today.

To accomplish the goal of re-orienting educational practices towards what James Toub referred to as the shifting “locus” of students’ orientation to the world, we must allow our students to access and leverage the tools of contemporary discourse for both playful and serious expression. This may take the form of analyzing media representations in popular culture (Buckingham, 2003/2007; 2008; Hobbs, 2011), creating documentaries about local communities (Choudhury & Share, 2012), curating and remixing news media to tell new stories (Mihailidis, 2011), or students designing video game concepts to represent historical events (DP). In each of these examples, students are provided an opportunity to engage with scholarly ideas in ways that align with the realities of popular culture and students’ lived experiences.

Beyond the ivory tower. In many ways, the importance of building community in the classroom may be the most significant finding of my research. We know that higher education faces countless challenges related to increasing structure and bureaucratization which often results in increased class sizes and limited support (Mossman, 2018; LeMenager & Foote, 2012; Leiserowitz and Fernandez, 2008; Sahlins, 2009). Within such a context, the work we do in the classroom—when we gather together to rejoice in the exchange of ideas—must be viewed as *the* opportune time to connect with students, connect students with one another, and position them to exchange ideas and experience learning together.

The findings from my study suggest that aesthetic teaching practices are an important way in which community is cultivated. Similar to the literature I reviewed on the topic of aesthetic teaching (Eslamian, Jafari, and Neyestani, 2017; Sotiropoulou-Zormpala, 2012), Faculty Fellows and coordinators describe building connections between students by playing games like throwing balls (CS), improve acting the role of a gallery curator for a classmate's photography exhibit (JG), and sharing experiences through rough drafts of creating writing projects (JB). Each of these stories from participants illustrate ways in which teachers are working to maximize the potential of a learning experience to build community among learners and thereby increase the relevance of higher education beyond the ivory tower. In an age of increasing structure and dehumanization in higher education (Giroux, 2019; 2019; Mossman, 2018), and increasing distractions (Turkle, 2012; Rushkoff, 2013), institutions of higher education, and the teachers working within, must make it their mission to increase authenticity in education.

Along with measures taken inside the classroom itself, the notion of expanding the classroom can be seen as one of the more achievable measure that arguably ought to be taken by all faculty in higher education. As recommended in my previous conclusions, faculty development is a necessary step in the process towards further refining community-building practices. Teachers need to be made aware of the benefits, resources, and methods for teaching beyond the walls of the traditional classroom. Further, in addition to faculty development, teachers need to be celebrated for the many ways in which they are striving to build community beyond the walls of the classroom.

Finally, perhaps the most progressive way in which I observed Faculty Fellows and coordinators of the BMCS building community involved outreach and partnership with local and regional community organizations. These types of integrated service learning components provide opportunities for students to collaborate firsthand with local community and industry leaders in authentic ways that illustrate the value, and impact of scholarly curriculum on the local community population is to

How can educators develop these connections? How might institutional administrators nurture and support these relationships? All teachers need to be asking, “in what ways can my classroom help the community?” The answer could be as small as sharing poetry with a local newspaper, or as grand as designing buildings for neighboring community organizations.

Future Studies

Boundless potential and possibilities exist for scholars seeking to further explore the spirit of progressive education in the 21st Century, or the phenomenon of the Black Mountain College Semester (BMCS).

Central finding from my research related to the importance of creativity and creative thinking in education, and while these elements served as the results of my study, they provide an ideal point of origin for future studies. Research should be conducted to further investigate the role of creativity in non-arts related courses as a means of better understanding how educators foster innovation in their courses.

Branching out from higher education, research might consider investigating the spirit of Black Mountain College in nearby elementary and high schools. Researchers might examine the ways in which K-12 schools are working to place creativity, innovation, and community at the center of the curriculum.

Research should also be conducted to explore what being “Fully Awake” (Zommer & House, 2008) in the classroom looks like in the 21st Century. As we grapple with our current state of being constantly connected to information, what does presence look like in education today?

Exploring the nature of higher education at small colleges with holistic practices in the 21st Century would be another productive area of study. Building upon my research finding related to the ever-present tension that exists between academic structure and

freedom, scholars might investigate the steps small institutions of higher education are taking to foster an environment of student freedom and autonomy.

Conclusions

BMC was known as an institution of learning where educational experiences happen beyond the walls of the classroom. In a traditional sense, this manifested as taking a class outside to embrace the raw and organic beauty of the local mountain environment, but in a less-traditional way learning happened at unexpected times and places: from lively class discussions that spill over into out-of-class time, to after dinner scholarly debates that lasted well into the night, to musical exhibitions, and even theatrical performances put on by the school community.

In an age of increased standardization (Mossman, 2018) and “bean counting” (JM), institutions of higher education must find ways to offer course credit for attending and even developing/organizing such extracurricular activities. One suggestion would be to offer a general education course where students seek out events sponsored by the university—or community—while reporting back to the class on the significance of their discoveries along the way. In this way, students might feel more motivated, even empowered, to participate in the life of the greater university community while remaining focused on the accumulation of credit hours towards completion.

While institutions of higher education today might be equally as committed to education as BMC was, their commitments are necessarily geared more towards maintaining the structure and order of the organization, and increasing its profit margins, than they are

towards learning. As Billy Schumann stated during our interview, “that’s why we are here today and BMC is not” (BS).

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Appendix A: Working Interview Questions

Teaching, Learning, and Life

- How did you get into teaching?
- How did you come to app?
- What are some of the biggest challenges you face as an educator? In terms of the classroom?
- What inspires you in the classroom? About teaching?
- Since you got into education, what's changed?
- Have you seen changes in media and technology effect teaching and learning?
- Have they effected your teaching practice?
- What's the worst use of technology in the classroom you have ever witnessed or perpetrated? What is the best?
- How have media and communication technologies affected your life? Lives of your students?
- What is the role of technology in education?
- What do we do about these changes as educators?
- What is the relationship between education and democracy?
- What is the role of making or creating in your teaching / classroom?
- How can we best prepare students to face the challenges of the 21st century?
- How do you deal with issues of race, class, gender, in your teaching?

BMCS

- How did you learn of, and get involved with, the Black Mountain College Semester?
- Tell me about an experience you had during BMCS?
- Tell me about the way you integrated the BMC into your curriculum?
- How did integrating the BMC effect what you do in the classroom?
- Is there anything we have not talked about that you want people to know?

Appendix B: The Purpose of the College

THE PURPOSE OF THE COLLEGE

The purpose of the college is to lead on to creative consciousness a carefully selected group of talented young men and young women who are eager to know, to will, and to do.

The medium for the development of a broad-minded personality which can function cooperatively, are the subjects taught and the activities fostered by the college.

The study of the sciences and of mathematics not only aims at the assimilation of fundamental knowledge, but has for its main purpose the methodic training of young minds to form, in the face of life itself, judgments of fact based on strict evidence.

A closer acquaintance ^{with} the humanities in a larger sense (English language and literature, social science and history, philosophy, ~~and psychology~~ and theory of education, ancient languages and literature, foreign languages and literature), tends to develop in the student a differentiating sense for judgments of value, guiding him to ^{self-knowledge and} a social and psychological understanding and critical appreciation of the many norms and forms which regulate the instincts, inspirations, and purposes of human life.

The cultivation of the free arts strives for a refinement of the esthetic faculties of the mind, leading to a discriminating taste and tact.

Thus, the active exercise and thought in the realm of the beautiful as ~~inspiration~~ for culture; in the realm of the true as purposeful study in the realm of the good as tentative approach, ought to develop a harmony of superindividual interests where, under the light of a Socratic treatment and scientific method, all the Muses lead.

The social, athletic and recreational activities are destined to add a variety of interests conducive to a healthy, rich and good life, which ought to elevate the soul of the student above mere pleasure seeking or self-centered attitudes.

The main purpose of the college can be defined as intellectual, if the meaning of the word is understood as an attitude of the mind conscious ^{of inner freedom in judgement and action} of the satisfaction and happiness which knowledge gives to the individual who assimilates it, provided he has learned at the same time, with regard to the limitations of all knowledge, to straighten out the deviating truth-seeking adventure, with a sense of healthy scepticism, good natured irony, and spiritual humor.

The method of the pursuit and search for knowledge is thus to be rooted in young minds in the spirit of the Christian, democratic wisdom of western civilization.

"As to knowledge, we all have knowledge; knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth." (St. Paul.)

"It is better to be wise than to be learned; it is better to be good, than to be wise." (An old English saying.)

inner freedom in judgement and action

Appendix C: Organizing and Procedures at Black Mountain College

Organization and Procedure at Black Mountain College

John Rice, Rector
Black Mountain College

Before attempting to give you some idea of the organization of Black Mountain College (you may indeed begin to wonder, by the time I have finished, whether the word 'organization' should be used at all), I should like to make it clear that there is no claim of novelty. Every idea and procedure that we have is almost as old as recorded thought. If, however, anyone should insist upon using the word 'new', it could apply only to the fact that these ancient ideas and devices are brought together in, at times, a different relationship. It will also be clear, I hope, that Black Mountain College is not an attempt to solve the whole problem of higher education, that it is good for some students and some teachers, but not for all.

Among the auspices under which the college was started, with which you are probably already acquainted, I mention one particularly - the depression. We had very little money, and we have very little money now. But professors, even in institutions other than Black Mountain College, are, I believe, not unacquainted with poverty. In fact, I think that our poverty was one of the strongest cohesive forces, in the beginning. We are beginning to hope now that we shall not have to depend upon it too long. If you are interested in the painful business of money, I shall be glad to give you the auditor's statements for the first two years. All of us are well fed, if not so obviously so as myself.

One might say that the dining room is the centre of the College, for here you can see most clearly at work most of the ideas and devices on which the College at present relies. At the ringing of a bell -- this bell, incidentally, is the only one that is rung in College, and its purpose is not to call people to meals but to keep them out of the dining room until it is rung -- all of us, students and Faculty, go to the dining room and seat ourselves wherever we choose, at one

of the eleven tables, each containing eight places. ((In the course of a fortnight each one of us will probably have sat at least one meal with every member of the College)). Someone tips a chair up and goes out to the kitchen for the food. Later on, someone else will clear the table and remove the dishes, and others will bring on dessert and coffee. All this is done voluntarily, alike by students and Faculty. The absence of student waiters, or waiters of any kind, makes possible the continuing of a conversation to the satisfaction, or exhaustion, of those who take part in it. Into the dining room flow ideas that have been let loose in classroom or study, and it is here that some of the best teaching and learning in the College is done. I should not like to give you the impression, however, of a group of people perpetually engaged in serious conversation, for folly has its place even in education.

At one end of the dining room is the stage, and between the stage and the tables, a wide space used for dancing, as a rule three or four times a week after dinner. Just off a corner of the dining room is a music room.

If there were a picture hanging on the wall, you would have in this small space the beginning-point of the curriculum; but not the curriculum itself, for the student is the curriculum, or, if you choose, the curriculum is the student. Within this small space, however, at meal-time is the College, all there is of the College, for there is no outside control of anything we do. Instead of the usual Board of Trustees, there is an Advisory Council composed in the main of people who are distinguished for their interest in education. Whenever advice on any particular or general question is wanted, it is asked of one or more of the Board - but their power ends with persuasion. The ultimate responsibility, legal and otherwise, for the College, rest in the Corporation, which is the Faculty. The managing body of the College is a kind of executive committee, called the Board of Fellows, which is elected by the Faculty, at the present time, from its own members. The important matters of finance and

appointment to the Faculty are the responsibilities of the Board. As officers the College has, as titular head, a Rector, who presides over all Faculty and general meetings and acts as the representative of the College outside of the College -- if he is unable to persuade one of his colleagues that it is his duty to do so. A Treasurer, Secretary, and Registrar, all of them also teachers, complete the roll of officers of the Corporation.

From the student body there are four officers, elected by the students, who meet periodically with the Board of Fellows to iron out such difficulties and solve such questions as can be handled without recourse to a larger meeting, and who also attend one meeting of the Faculty a month, the one concerned with the general affairs of the College. (The three other Faculty meetings of the month are given over entirely to consideration of the general problems of education. These meetings are the outcome of the slightly indelicate suggestion that college teaching might be improved.) This close cooperation between students and Faculty is essential, in a College which professes to have no rules - a profession that is difficult in the maintaining, because there is not infrequently a clamor for the imposition of rules and regulations from those who suffer from the tyranny of freedom.

I have said before that the student is the curriculum. This means of course that there are no required courses. It does not, however, mean that there is no required knowledge; but how the student acquires his knowledge is his own affair, whether it be in classroom, laboratory, library, or lying in the sun. When the new student comes in, he, or she, is requested not to register for any courses the first week, but to spend this time visiting classes, talking with teachers and students, and finding out the best thing for him to do. The result is frequently disastrous, for, curiously enough when no courses are required, too many courses are taken; so that the first struggle of the advisor, who has been chosen by the student during the first week, with his advisee, is in trying to

persuade the student not to attempt more than he can do. Not infrequently a student brings to his advisor the preposterous schedule of eight courses, which is reduced, if reduced at all, with tears, or the masculine equivalent. We strongly urge students not to take more than four courses, preferably three. But this advice is seldom taken. The attempt is made in the very beginning to make the student realize that it is the student's responsibility to acquire such education as he can. (James Harvey Robinson used to say that he thought the student ought to be allowed to participate in his own education). He is also urged very strongly to include in his schedule either art or dramatics or music, or more than one of these; for one of the beliefs of the College is that education is essentially a creative process. Certainly any educational process that leaves out action is no education for America, and it is better that this action take place in the discipline of one of the arts than to be merely fraternal and social, or muscular and gladiatorial; not that we have it in mind to turn out a lot of little tin-pot artists, but that the student shall rather learn the process or method that the artist pursues, which, we believe, is applicable not only to the material ordinarily associated with art but to every other kind of human activity.

In order to ensure the student's going at his own pace, as far as possible, and satisfying his curiosity as it develops, we try to make the whole life of the College as flexible as possible. If a student finds out that a course is not what he should be taking, he is urged to drop it at that moment and not wait till any future fixed time. In fact, we are now seriously considering having the students register at the end of the term for the courses that they have already taken, so that what they have done may become a part of their record, rather than a declaration of intention, which is what registration at the beginning of a term is.

At the end of about two years, the student decides whether he is prepared to take a general examination, written and oral, for passing from the Junior

Division to the Senior Division. The purpose of this examination is to be part of a test as to whether the student has reached sufficient maturity to assume the responsibility of fairly intense specialization in some field. I say "part" of a test because it seems to us that to rely entirely upon examinations, which is to leave time out of account, is to put a premium upon a very narrow kind of ability. Sir Walter Raleigh, who used to be Professor of English at Oxford, used to say that when Plato said "The unexamined life is no life", he was probably not referring to the Oxford final examinations.

This is no place, nor is it my intention, to argue the matter of examinations. I simply content myself with saying that any college or university which relies entirely upon examinations makes education mainly a matter of acquiring vocabulary, with or without meaning.

If the student wishes the College to make a record of its opinion of him, he will also take another examination at approximately the end of the fourth year, this time within a prescribed field in which he has been working for about two years. In his petition to the Faculty for the right to be examined, he makes a statement of what he professes to know in his chosen field. The Faculty determines whether his is a reasonable petition. If the answer is Yes, then one or more professors from other institutions are invited to examine the student not on what they think the student ought to know at the end of four years, but on whether the student actually knows what he professes to know within his field. These outside examiners do not, however, decide whether the student shall graduate. This again rests with the Faculty, who take into account not only the result of the examination but the quality of the student's work previous to examination. Even if the student passes a final examination brilliantly, we do not propose to perpetuate a grim joke by calling him an educated man. (It is worth noticing that the word 'educated' is a perfect passive participle: perfect, meaning that it is

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finished, passive, meaning what it says, and participle, meaning that he has only had something to do with it, the amount not designated). But to send out from the College people who have acquired some ability in handling the material of the intellectual world and, more important still, handling themselves in relation to other people.

Vita

A native of the mountains of North Carolina, John brings a background in professional video production, photography, educational media and technology, and curriculum design to his work as a teacher and scholar at Appalachian State University. He grew up in a small town in western North Carolina where he was inspired to study photography as a means of exploring and the expansive Appalachian Mountains that surround his home.

John studied Industrial Technology with a concentration in Technical Photography (now Commercial Photography) at Appalachian State University, earning his Bachelor's Degree in Science in 2004. After a self-driven entrepreneurial endeavor working in real estate media, he taught media production with at-risk youth as part of a grant-funded arts program in rural Vermont. John later attended Boston University, graduating in 2011 with a Master's Degree in Educational Media and Technology and K-12 Instructional Technology Teaching License.

Currently, John is in his ninth year in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Appalachian State University where he works as a Senior Lecturer, teaching in both Teacher Education and Media Studies programs. He teaches courses in digital media production where students explore ways to cultivate their storytelling abilities through the use of cameras and microphones. He also teach a course in technology integration with pre-service teachers, where an emphasis is placed on pedagogy and fostering a student-centered, experiential learning. John graduated with his Ed. D in Educational Leadership from Appalachian State University in December 2019.